

Fortean *times*

MAMA WAS A WEEPING STONE

Turkey's enigmatic
rock goddess

DEMONS OF OZ

Revelations of
ritual abuse

SONIC EXPLORERS

Coil interviewed

GHOST SQUADRON

Phantom aircraft haunt the skies



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Fortean times

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GORDON RUTTER brings together folklore & fungi in his look at fairy rings.

LANDSCAPE OF PANIC
PATRICK HARPUR presents tales of terror in the no-man's-land of the night.

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editorial



The Devil made me do it

THE DEVIL'S WORK

We at FT have been pretty sceptical in the past about claims of Satanic and Ritual Child Abuse. In our defence, our objection to the idea of organised Satanists sacrificing children, cannibalistic feasts and so on had to do with methods by which 'memories' were recovered from self-professed victims and 'survivors' by psychotherapists and others. Hypnotic memory recovery is condemned by law enforcement and psychiatric experts as unreliable and open to confabulation by the patient and manipulation by the therapist. We have argued that such cases are significantly different from those in which paedophiles might use the trappings of Satanism, witchcraft, even conventional religion, to frighten victims into submission and silence.

Lately, however, a number of different cases have surfaced which suggest we should not be quick to dismiss the idea of ritual abuse employing organised religion, be it Satanism or Christianity. In Tennessee, a man was sentenced to 24 years in prison after he admitted three counts of "sexual battery" of a girl under the age of 10 during "satanic rituals." The child was the daughter of a woman member of the Satanic group. (*The Tennessean*, 30 Sept 2000.)

In Australia, Daniel Thomas Serie, the founder of a pagan group called the Coven of Loth Lorian, is on trial in Melbourne accused of twice raping a woman member of another coven in a consecrated circle. Serie, who no longer leads the coven, told the court that he was duty-bound to have sex with his high priestess; the woman took a different view of the 'ritual', claiming she feared she was to be sacrificed. (*Melbourne Herald Sun*, 9 Nov 2000.) The point is that, whatever the legitimacy of the beliefs of a group who come together for religious activities, there are abuses of ritual and authority to satisfy personal lusts.

Meanwhile, in Britain, 42 of the 52 regional police authorities are investigating allegations of physical, mental and sexual abuse in children's homes, many of them run by religious institutions. The tales told to one self-help group - Survivors of Child Abuse, UK

tel: 02476 551952 - are horrifying yet typical of sexual and physical abuse by priests. The Irish government and the Catholic Church in Ireland have been shamed into agreeing to pay compensation to children abused while in their care. (*Times*, 6 Oct 2000.) In England and Wales, the Catholic Church was forced to admit that 300 of its priests had been convicted of offences against children in a four-year period (*Times*, 13 Sept 2000.) In Scotland, an

Aberdeen court upheld complaints against a nun who beat and starved the children in her care.

In Australia, the results of the Forde Inquiry into abuse in state and religious run children's institutions was published last year and it roundly condemned the way in which the state and church authorities turned a blind eye to the incontrovertible evidence of sexual and physical abuse. This is the subject of Richard Seary's report on page 30. It is incredible, in this day and age, that vulnerable children in care can be subjected to rape, torture and starvation in these terrible places. Says Richard: "It is a betrayal of trust and nothing

less than a war on children. The authorities responsible must be brought to account."

FT140 & BACK ISSUE ORDERS

It's come to our attention that some subscribers have not received their copy of FT140. If you feel you have missed out, do write to us at the Boathouse address and we'll endeavour to send a replacement. Also, we now have a dedicated phone number for ordering back issues - 01454 642458

UnCONVENTION 2001

We recently learned that we cannot hold UnCon 2000 around the end of April at the Commonwealth Institute (CI) due to essential repairs there. The choices before us are to hold it at the CI later in the year or to go back to the Institute of Education, scene of two previous cons. We were unable to resolve the uncertainty in time to make an announcement this issue, but we hope to have solid news for you next issue.

Bob Rickard Paul Sieveking



COVER IMAGE ALEX TOMLINSON

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'FORTEAN'?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort.

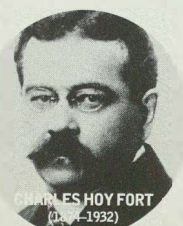
Throughout his life, Fort was sceptical about scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away (which is quite different from explaining a thing).

Fort, born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy

in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

His dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate state between extremes. He had ideas of the universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena.

He coined the term 'teleportation' and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."



CHARLES HOY FORT (1874-1932)

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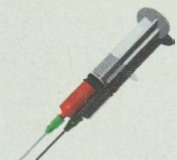
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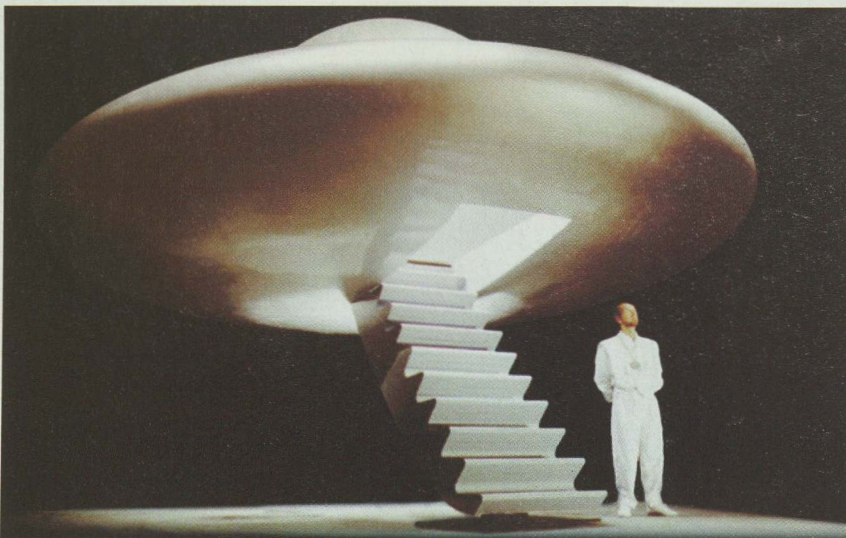
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The clones have landed...

Raël's flying saucer religion wants to expand its congregation by cloning its members



A MAN WITH A PLAN: Former journalist Claude Vorilhon would like to download memory next...

CLONAIID, A COMPANY SET UP BY THE Raelian movement (a flying saucer religion), has announced that it has initiated proceedings to clone a 10-month-old girl who died in February. An anonymous US couple are paying \$500,000 (£330,000) to be the first parents of a cloned human. The procedure will be carried out in Nevada. Cloning humans is not illegal in the US, if supported by private funds, though the Food and Drug Administration will no doubt be keeping a close eye on the operation, and it is within their authority to refuse the Raelians a permit. Cloning plays a central part in Raelian beliefs. According to their cosmology, received by founder Raël (previously sports journalist Claude Vorilhon) in 1973, all life was created through genetic manipulation by advanced human scientists, the Elohim mentioned in the *Bible*, 25,000 years ago. "The purpose of this project is to create eternal life," said Brigitte Boisselier, the Raelians' scientific director, who holds a PhD in physical and biomolecular chemistry. New Raelian recruits sign a contract instructing morticians to extract a piece of skull – the third

eye – so they can one day be "resurrected" as a clone. Raelians gather four times a year for "the transmission of the cellular plan", when the Elohim pass over in their saucers and register the gathered throng's DNA. Over 50 Raelian women are said to have volunteered to act as surrogate mothers, including Marina Coclios, the 22-year-old daughter of Boisselier. "Cloning will offer new hope to humanity because it will provide ways of curing so many diseases," she told reporters. The group has already begun to experiment with cloning animals, and expects to start working with human cells early next year, with the first pregnancies beginning in February. The process will be much like that used to successfully produce Dolly the sheep in 1997. Cells from the creature to be cloned are fused, using an electric current, to an egg cell whose genes have been removed. The combined cell then becomes an embryo, identical to the original cell donor, which is implanted into a surrogate womb. Although the process is entirely safe for the surrogate mothers, it's likely that there will be numerous failed

pregnancies before a child is successfully born: Dolly was the only survivor from 277 eggs that were fused with adult cells. Once born, however, most cloned creatures have been extremely healthy, many being larger and living longer than others of their species. It's thought that with 20 donors, each producing 20 eggs after hormone treatment, and 50 surrogate mothers, each carrying two eggs, the odds of producing a successful cloned child are quite high. The dead child's mother has not been asked to act as a surrogate, to spare her the anguish of losing the child again.

Clonaid claim to have several people on their waiting list, including infertile and homosexual couples. "The next step," writes Raël on the Clonaid web site, "like the Elohim with their 25,000 years of scientific advance, will be to directly clone an adult person without having to go through the growth process and to transfer memory and personality in this person. Then, we wake up after death in a brand new body just like after a good night sleep!" [sic] For US \$50,000, Clonaid also offer DNA insurance, Insuraclone, to provide you with healthy cells throughout your life, and a pet cloning service, Clonapet.

It's likely that Clonaid aren't the only group actively working to produce a human clone, even if they are the first to announce it. Boisselier told the press conference that her four-strong team, incorporating a biochemist, a geneticist, a cell fusion expert and a French medical doctor, all "know what they're doing". Clonaid have previously worked with Dr Richard Seed, who, in 1998, announced that he was ready to produce a clone of his wife.

If the Raelians succeed, the first cloned humans could be born within a year, when they will themselves become the Elohim whom they revere. All they need now is a time machine and the circle is complete. *D.Express*; *Int.Herald Tribune*, 11 Oct; *Hong Kong Mail*, 17 Oct; *S.Times*, 5 Nov 2000. For more on Clonaid, see FT126:47.

More info: <http://www.rael.org>;
<http://www.clonaid.com>

Lord of the horizon

One of Graham Hancock's 10 complaints to BSC is upheld



HANCOCK'S HALF HOUR: *Horizon* was a bit unfair

IN THE FIRST JUDGEMENT OF ITS KIND, THE Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) has criticised *Horizon*, BBC TV's prestige science programme, for being unfair to Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval, who champion the theory that many ancient cultures were founded by a 'lost civilisation' before it was destroyed in a global catastrophe around 10,500BC. *Independent*, 9 Nov 2000.

In the *Horizon* documentary 'Atlantis Reborn' – aired on 4 November 1999 – Dr Edwin Krupp, director of the Griffith Observatory, said the authors' assertion that the arrangements of pyramids at Giza represented the constellation of Orion "could be made to work only by turning upside down

either the image of Egypt or that of the sky". Importantly, *Horizon* had omitted the authors' rebuttal of Dr Krupp's argument, claiming it was based on a modern convention that North is 'up'. The ancient Egyptians, they say, would have modelled the pyramids on Orion "as they saw it".

However, this was the only complaint out of 10 made by Hancock and Bauval that the BSC upheld. The other complaints included Hancock's claim that the programme made him out to be an "intellectual fraud", and that it made Bauval's claim for the Giza-Orion correlation – which also associated the Nile with the Milky Way – to be fraudulent.

On his website – www.grahamhancock.com – Hancock said he was shocked by the way *Horizon* treated him and Bauval. "The two months following the screening... were a bad time for me. I felt confused... as though, at the very least, I had been violently mugged... by someone I had trusted."

The BBC will now re-edit the *Horizon* documentary "slightly" for re-broadcasting on 14 December. However, they have turned down an offer by Hancock and Bauval to meet their critics in a televised debate following the broadcast. John Lynch, Creative Director of Science at the BBC, also refused to give Hancock permission to include a full transcript of the *Horizon* documentary in a new edition of their book *Fingerprints of the Gods*. Hancock branded the BBC an "arrogant mammoth" and said he will defy the ban.

Circle maker in the dock

Computer technician comes a cropper at Wiltshire magistrates court

FINALLY, AFTER MORE than 20 years of growing media interest in crop circles, a practitioner has been fined for his art.

Matthew Williams, 29, an unemployed computer technician from Bishops Cannings, Wiltshire, spent a leisurely three nights in August with a friend making a seven-pointed star near his home in a wheat field at Manor Farm, West Overton, with planks and poles.

Williams published a picture of his work on the Internet and (asking for trouble), emailed a detailed confession to Professor Michael Glickman, grandiloquently described by the *Daily Mail* as "a world authority on crop circles," who alerted the police. (This is one compelling



WILLIAMS: Post a pic on the web, confess via email, get arrested...

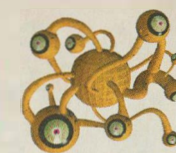
reason why the main crop artists don't own up to their

masterpieces.) Glickman was quoted as saying there had been 150 circles this year "of which seven or eight were possibly man-made."

Williams, who set up his own magazine on paranormal phenomena, *Truthseekers' Review*, said: "The majority of crop circles are man-made, although I do be-

lieve some are the work of the paranormal." Damage to the wheat was estimated at £200 and he was fined £100 by Devises magistrates. Roger Jones, prosecuting, said: "Mr Williams showed no malice. He thought the farm belonged to another farmer who hadn't objected to crop circles in the past." *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, *Times*, 7 Nov 2000.

StrangeDays



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He sat here and
got plastered
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INTERIOR DÉCOR



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sidelines

SLOGAN CONFIRMED: Nick Baldwin, executive director of the electricity generating firm PowerGen, whose slogan is "Power, whatever the weather", was struck by lightning after being caught in a storm in Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah, and spent three days in intensive care. *Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette*, 30 Sept; *D.Telegraph*, 2 Oct 2000.

EEL DROPS IN: Visitors to the Sea Life Centre in Portsmouth were amazed when an 18in (46cm) eel plummeted from the sky and fell into a water tank. It was dropped from 200ft (61m) by a seagull which had presumably just plucked it from the sea. The eel was due to be returned to its natural habitat. *Metro*, 17 Oct 2000.

NOT SO GAY: On 22 September, Vietnam vet Ronald Edward Gay, 53, shot a man dead and wounded six others in the Backstreet Cafe, a gay bar in Roanoke, Virginia, because he was sick of jokes about his name. The ex-marine's brother William said he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder. *Int. Herald Tribune*, 26 Sept 2000.

IN YOUR FACE: Christine Forbes, 22, a self-professed Satanist and Marilyn Manson fan, has been jailed for four years for trying to kidnap a three-year-old girl for a human sacrifice. She grabbed the child as her mother took her to nursery school in Gelligaer, Caerphilly. As the women fought, Forbes repeatedly asked the terrified mother: "Can I kill your kid?" Mother and child managed to escape. *Times*, 30 Sept 2000.

RUDE WORD: The word "squaw" is being struck from place names across America out of respect for Native Americans. Early white trappers and frontiersmen assumed the word meant woman, but it actually means a woman's genitalia. On 6 June, Oklahoma became the latest state to erase the word from place names, such as Squaw Creek and Squaw Bridge, following the recent example of Minnesota, Montana and Maine. *D.Telegraph*, 7 June 2000.

POKEMON POWER: Birmingham fortune teller Sylvia Irving has dumped her tarot cards and is now predicting the future with Pokémon cards, the Japanese children's game. It began as a bet, but she has continued by popular request. R McCartney of Larne, writing to the *Belfast Telegraph*, says the cards are "fashioned after real evil spirits. [They] later become the trainers of their human counterparts. All Pokémon cards should be burned by wise parents." *Big Issue*, 21-27 Aug, 9-15 Oct 2000.

Immortal bacteria?

Space fungus are snacking on Mir, and panspermia's back on the agenda



AN AGGRESSIVE FORM OF NON-HUMAN LIFE IN space was discovered by a Russian cosmonaut as he gazed out of a window of the space station Mir in 1988. A thick living mat had made its way up the inside of the window's quartz surface, nearly obliterating his view of the Earth. Natalia Novikova, who heads the Microbial Protection Laboratory of the Russian government's Institute for Biomedical Problems, identified the growth as a space fungus, and found many varieties on board Mir, including common terrestrial genera such as *Aspergillus*, *Penicillium* and *Cladosporium*. Visitors have found numerous fungal patches with hues between green and black, feeding behind control panels, slowly digesting the ship's air-conditioner, communications unit and many other surfaces.

In the heavy radiation of space, these fungi could mutate. Francis Cucinotta, manager of the radiation health office at NASA's Johnson Space Center, published a paper in 1995 that found about 0.1% of bacterial spores would mutate after a year of the kind of radiation experienced on a mission to Mars. The fungi could possibly harm future space travellers, or even be carried back to Earth (especially if space debris survives atmospheric re-entry) to wreak havoc as they join the many microbes that relentlessly biodegrade metal, plastic and glass. Fungal infections could also explain why electronics fail more often than expected. *D.Express*, 7 Oct; *Toronto Star*, 8 Oct 2000.

SCIENTISTS HAVE REVIVED BACTERIA FROM A 250-million-year-old salt crystals excavated from the 2,000ft (600m)-thick salt beds of a vanished Permian Age ocean 1,850ft (560m) underground near Carlsbad in New Mexico. The news, announced in *Nature*, has revived interest in panspermia, the notion that bacterial spores can float through space and, in the unlikely event that conditions are right,

'seed' where they land. (Dr Monica Grady, a meteorite expert at the Natural History Museum, has said that meteorites found on Earth contained the same sort of salt crystals as this new find, and NASA scientists have previously cultured spores which have survived space's vacuum and hard radiation.)

Russell H Vreeland (above, left), of West Chester University, Pennsylvania, and colleagues William Rosenzweig (above, right) and Dennis Power, excavated the crystal from the air duct of a radioactive dump, sterilised its surface, and drilled into the 3-microlitre of brine trapped inside. They went to inordinate lengths to prevent contamination; they also sought to prove conclusively that the bacteria had not been deposited by groundwater at a later date. When nutrients were added, the bacteria appeared. The bacterium – isolate 2-9-3, provisionally named *Bacillus permians* – strongly resembles the halophilic *Bacillus marismortui* (from the Dead Sea) and *Virgibacillus pantothenticus*. Geomicrobiologist John Barnes of the University of Bristol raised the question of whether spore-forming bacteria, revived from their state of suspended animation, might be 'immortal', but recognised that the problem of entropy remains – spores should by now have degraded to simple compounds. Tom Lindahl, an expert on DNA stability, thinks it possible that spores could survive for a few thousand years, but that after that, radioactivity alone would render them unviable. He said the similarity of *Bacillus permians* and *Bacillus marismortui* was proof of contamination: a 250-million-year-old bacterium would have a radically different DNA sequence to its modern equivalent.

Before this find, the 'oldest living creature' was a *Bacillus sphaericus* found in the guts of a bee trapped in amber 25 to 40 million years ago. *Mirror*, *Guardian*, 19 Oct; *Int Herald Tribune*, 20 Oct; *New Scientist*, 21 Oct 2000.

Recent UFO sightings

Strange lights in Oz, a floating entity in US and cult weirdness in Silesia

Return to Bass Strait

At just after 7pm on 21 October 1978, Frederick Valentich (below) disappeared while flying a Cessna 182L over Bass Strait, off Victoria on Australia's south-west coast. In his last conversation with air traffic control, he described seeing a long metallic object with a green light: "...that strange aircraft is hovering on top of me again. It is hovering, and it's not an aircraft." This was his last message. There followed 17 seconds of open mic, during which loud metallic noises were heard, described by some as sounding like scraping. Valentich and his aircraft were never seen again.

Numerous theories were put forward to explain the disappearance: UFOs (there were over 50 sightings of unusual lights and objects in the area that day), drug smugglers, experimental aircraft or weaponry, even a lightning strike from a saucer-shaped lenticular cloud. But the mystery was never solved. In October, researchers announced that three new witnesses claimed to have seen a strange green light surround the Cessna at the time of the incident. "They saw both the lights of a small aircraft and a very large green light travelling directly above it," said Paul Norman, of the Victorian UFO Research Society. They had previously kept quiet for fear of ridicule. Now Valentich's mother Alberta hopes to raise funds for a fresh undersea search. She said that the late Jacques Cousteau had once sought permission from the government to dive in the area, but was turned down. In 1983, divers approached a TV producer with alleged photographs of the wreckage, but no deal could be arranged and the divers were never heard from again. *Herald Sun* (Australia), 11 Oct 2000. Updates will be available at <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~vufors/valentich.htm>



Flying tonight

A gliding "alien" creature was seen by five witnesses near Uniontown, Pennsylvania, on 3 August. The entity was described as being about 5ft (1.5m) tall, with slender extremities, carrying a brown staff, also 5ft (1.5m) long. It was flying about six inches (15cm) off the ground about 250ft (76m) from the witnesses, who also described an eerie silence, crickets and other background sounds being notably absent – a common factor in incidents of high strangeness.

The witnesses lost sight of the being when they drove off to gain a better vantage point. All of them described being unusually tired the next morning, though they suffered no other after effects. *PA UFO Hotline* (<http://www.westol.com/~paufo>), 7 Nov 2000.

Antrovis

Poland's Nationwide Committee for Defense against Sects (OKOPS) has warned of a revival of Antrovis, an apocalyptic flying saucer movement linked to several disappearances and at least one death, that of a castrated man fished out of the River Oder two years ago.

Antrovis achieved notoriety in the early 1990s, when it was found to have several academics amongst its ranks. They teach that only the chosen ones – Antrovis members – will be saved from an imminent global conflagration.

In time unhonoured fashion, when the moment comes, the faithful will be picked up via flying saucer from Sleza mountain in Lower Silesia, southwestern Poland.

Members are expected to leave their families and jobs and give all their money to the sect, who also claim to be able to replace damaged internal organs if members become ill.

After a slew of bad publicity and pressure from the media, Antrovis claimed to have ceased activities in 1994. However

OKOPS says that they have evidence to show that the group is still active, distributing literature to schools and universities.

FT has not heard of this group before, though the castration and saucer salvation remind us of Heaven's Gate (see FT100:35). We would welcome any further information, literature or material concerning them. *TV Polonia via BBC Monitoring*, 8 Nov 2000.

c'est la guerre



"THANKS, LOVE, BUT I'LL USE THE JAM JAR"

sidelines

INSIDE STORY: After complaining of acute stomach ache, a two-year-old boy was hospitalised last May in Heilongjiang province, north-east China. Doctors discovered the fist-sized foetus of his twin in his abdomen. *Weekend Bulletin* (Gold Coast, Australia), 17-18 June 2000.

WHAT A DUMP! Four lady bowlers were driving home to Dingee, near Bendigo in Victoria, Australia, when they collided with a cow which had just emerged from a gate. It broke a headlight, spun round and got its bovine backside jammed in the driver's side window. The frightened animal unburdened its sizeable bowels over one of the passengers. *Melbourne Herald Sun*, 6 Dec 1999.

ULURU ILLUMINED: A bit of space junk as big as a double-decker bus exploded in the desert near Uluru (Ayer's Rock) in Australia, lighting the night sky. "It looked like a huge star as it approached," said Leskar Burra at the local observatory station. "Some tourists assumed we had put on the light show as part of a night tour." The discarded rocket casing was from an American communications satellite launched in 1996. *[AP]* 26 Oct 2000.

ANCIENT RITE: John Hawk, 43, from Toledo, Ohio, was under psychiatric investigation after sawing off the head of his dead uncle, saying he planned to eat the brain to resurrect his spirit. *Scotland on Sunday*, 6 Aug 2000.

REPTILE PROBLEM: A hospital is using snake charmers to expel reptiles and scorpions terrorising staff and patients in Assiut, Egypt, where the Virgin Mary appeared a few weeks earlier [FT140:25]. *Mirror*, 27 Sept 2000.

UNKINDLY LIGHT: Shards of glass showered the congregation at a church in Fort William in the Scottish Highlands when a light exploded as the choir was finishing a hymn with the words "nothing can our peace destroy". *Lochaber News*, 16 Sept 2000.

FISHY GRAVE: Spencer Maffey of Little Hulton, Greater Manchester, found a goldfish floating lifelessly in its tank. Knowing that step-daughter Shauni Riley would want to help bury her pet fish, he put it in the freezer in a tissue paper shroud until she came home, when they buried it in the garden. Five days later, the family cat came into the kitchen with the wriggling goldfish in his mouth. It was returned to its tank and seemed none the worse for the ordeal. *Manchester Eve. News*, 14 July 2000.



sidelines

WHOOOPS! In San Jose, California, civic dignitaries welcomed a group of Filipino businessmen by displaying a huge banner reading "Tuloy po kayo", or "Welcome Filipinos!" Well, what it actually read was "Tuley po kayo" ("Circumcise Filipinos!"). Their reaction is unrecorded. *Guardian*, 25 Oct 2000.

CALLS TO THE DEAD: Russian mafiosi are being buried with pagers so the bereaved can send messages to them in the afterlife. The practice came to light after cemetery workers complained of hearing beeping from graves. That's the story from the *Sunday Times* (10 Sept 2000); a week later, it was relocated to Sicily (*Sunday Mirror*, *Sunday Times*, 17 Sept 2000).

STINKING MEMORIAL: The world's first museum dedicated to fermented herring will open in northern Sweden next year. The pungent delicacy called *surströmming* was developed by the Vikings and is continued today by fishermen in the Gulf of Bothnia. Only two per cent of the 800,000 cans produced annually are exported – to expatriate Swedes who long for the sharp odour, thought by most foreigners to resemble that of dog excrement. *National Post* (Toronto), 28 July 2000.

ON PAIN OF DEATH: Gil Bernardi, mayor of the village of Le Lavandou on the French Riviera, issued a decree ordering people not to die. "It is forbidden for any person not in possession of a family vault to die in the village's territory," it said. The cemetery is full, and a court in Nice has blocked plans for a new one. [AFP] 21 Sept; *Guardian*, 23 Sept 2000.

THAT'S HOT! Violent protests broke out on 5 July over a lack of drinking water in the town of Abadan, south-western Iran, where temperatures in the shade had reached an unprecedented 127°F (53°C) in the shade over the previous four days. [AFP] 6 July 2000.

SUSPICIOUS: Rudolf Scharping, the German Defence Minister, was injured when an anti-terrorist barrier sprang up beneath his car as it approached the Pentagon to visit the US Secretary of Defence. He suffered a serious cut on his foot and scraped his head on the roof when the steel barricade lifted the vehicle two feet (60cm). Two years ago, the Japanese Defence Minister, Fukushirou Nukaga, was injured in a similar "accident". Is this belated revenge for World War II? *Irish Independent*, 7 Sept 2000.

Worldwide spook-watch

Polt bothers spooks, ghosts unnerve kids and a haunted Indian murderer



Chilean firestarter

Seven allegedly spontaneous fires broke out in less than a week in a building occupied by the Wackenhut security agency, responsible for guarding many super-secret sites within the USA, as well as building high security prisons around the world. Workers in the wooden building, at 480 Avenida Arturo Prat in front of Cavancha Beach in Iquique, Chile, have also reported hearing clanking chains, wailing babies and screaming children. Objects, some of them bolted on, were also seen flying off the walls in several. Heavy furniture was said to have moved around of its own accord. On one occasion firefighters saw plates, pictures and clocks flying from one end of the main hall to another. The largest fire broke out on 6 October, when Chilean President Ricardo Lagos and Mayor Jorge 'Choro' Soria of Iquique toured Cavancha Park, about 1,650ft (500m) from the building. It took several fire crews to extinguish it; they said that the flames appeared to come from no identifiable source.

Psychic Silvia 'Silvita' Veloso was sent to the house by a local newspaper. She said that the house had been home to a sorcerer named Gait, who had once summoned the spirit of a famous doctor. She also claimed to have predicted the fire before it happened. Less than two

weeks previously, Iquique had been victim of a Chupacabras outbreak (see FT140:22). *El Mercurio* 8 October; *La Cuarta* 11 October 2000

School invaded by ghosts

Kang'au primary school in Kitui, Kenya, was closed on 17 May and more than 400 pupils sent home following an alleged invasion of ghosts, which had made some children "behave strangely." Parents threatened to raid the home of a school committee official whom they accused of sending the *jinis*, and vowed to lynch him if he refused "to remove his satanic guests." They gave the names of children who had suddenly spoken very fluent Kiswahili and of others had fallen sick or died because of the invasion. They said their appeal to Kitui District Commissioner Eliud Parsankul to intervene and solve the problem had gone unheeded.

On 18 May, a female ghost-buster known as Mama Ndingili unearthed bloodstained charms at the school – a cowrie, shell, a bottle and a small gourd with strings around them. Similar charms were found at the home of the accused school official, who was guarded by armed policemen against the frenzied crowd. Mama Ndingili said she would take the ghosts to Mombasa and drown them in the sea. *Nairobi Nation*, 18+20 May 2000.

Victim 'haunts' murderer

A man in Bangalore killed his friend after he found they were both in love with the same woman. He kept the murder a secret, pretending it was an accident. Everyone believed his story till he confessed to police that he was behind the murder. His murdered friend had apparently appeared in his dreams and threatened him.

Hailing from Yarabnagar, Banashankari police limits, Aiyaz Pasha and Akram Ahmed were in love with S Sophia. Pasha wanted Ahmed, an autorickshaw driver, out of the way. He hatched a plan with his friends Asgar and Imtiyaz and invited Ahmed for a picnic near Sangam on 13 August 1998. He tricked Ahmed into drinking poison. After that, he was strangled and the body dumped in the forest. Pasha returned home, pretending nothing had happened. Ahmed's parents, worried about their son's disappearance, contacted the police.

Ahmed, meanwhile, began to 'appear' in Pasha's dreams and haunted him everywhere. Pasha visited a local magician and consulted a witch doctor; but they couldn't help and his nightmares continued. Unable to bear it anymore, Pasha gave in and confessed to murdering his friend. After his arrest, he probably had a sound sleep at the Bangalore Central Jail! *Times of India*, 10 June 2000.

Thai wonder

This 9.4in (24cm) two-headed terrapin was displayed at a fisheries trade fair in Bangkok, Thailand, in July. Such creatures (with two heads or one) are a local delicacy used for making soup. *Edinburgh Eve. News*, 14 July 2000. POPPER/REUTERS





Strange Days

sidelines

HOUSE STOLEN: An Ecuadorian merchant returned home to the port city of Guayaquil from a business trip in July to find that his house and everything in it had vanished. Fulton Porozo Quiñonez found a vacant lot where his modular home had been. Neighbours said four men had disassembled the house, which he had bought a year earlier. [AP] 22 July 2000.

CANICIDE: Two giant seagulls attacked a Yorkshire terrier on a beach in Monaco in front of its horrified owner and carried it hundreds of yards out to sea to its death. Sun, 8 July 2000.

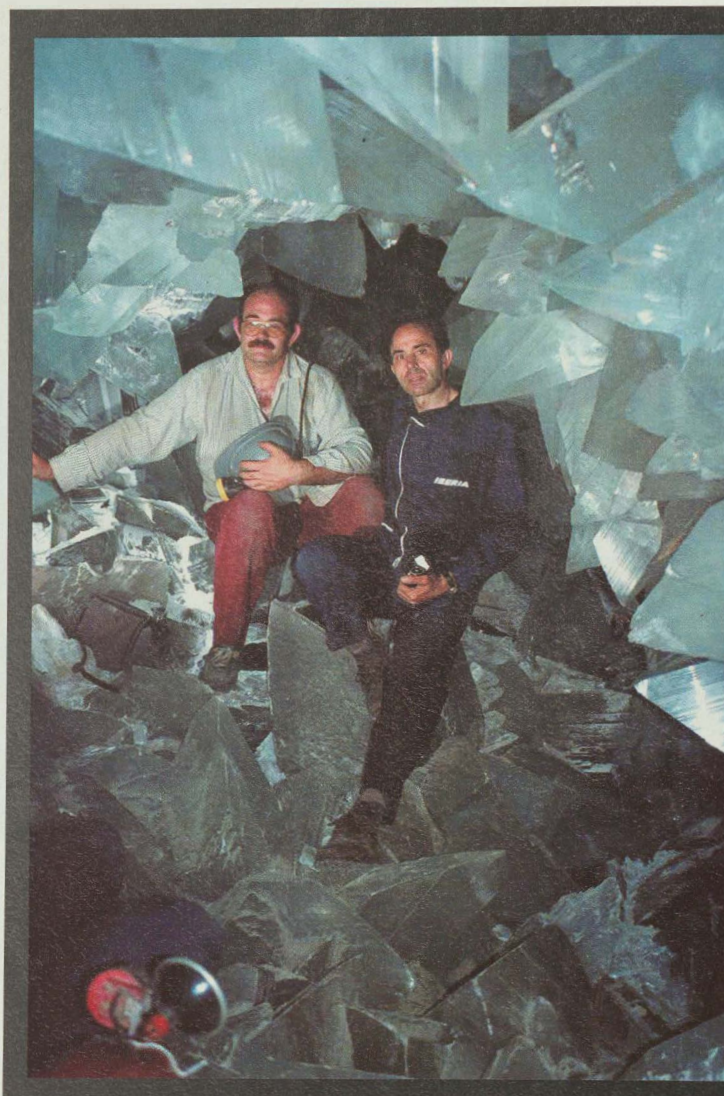
DANGER AT HOME: Government statistics show that doctors annually treat 96,000 people for sleep injuries. In 1998, 37,048 people had hospital treatment after accidents involving their slippers. Another 1,543 were treated for injuries involving tissue paper, 371 came to harm putting on their underwear, and 59 were hurt by Blu-Tak. A further 439,000 people were treated after injuring themselves just ambulating around their homes. Metro, 24 May 2000.

DIGIT THEFT: Relatives of a dead man entered a morgue in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and cut off his thumbs and toes. The three men from East Sepik province, charged with tampering with a body, wanted the digits to determine if their relative had died from sorcery. Melbourne Age, 2 Aug 2000.

HEAVENLY MUSIC: An organist got the fright of his life when a bolt of lightning hit the church tower and made the organ play by itself. West Mersea Daily Press (Essex), 23 Aug 2000.

SNAKE EAT SNAKE: As she made her way to an outside lavatory at a friend's place in Cooktown, Queensland, on 10 August, Lulu Miller encountered a 5ft 7in (1.7m) taipan snake sitting up ready to strike. She screamed and it slithered underneath the high-set house. Her boyfriend Sven Anderson poked it out into the open with a stick and shot it below the head with his .22 rifle. Something alive was coming out of the wound in its neck, so he shot the taipan again, this time near the tail. A head of another snake then appeared. It was a 4ft 3in (1.3m) python. Brisbane Courier Mail, 15 Sept 2000.

DRIED UP: Bedfordshire's emergency planning officer failed to attend a special meeting on the fuel crisis because he was stuck at home in Coventry with no petrol. Bedfordshire on Sunday, 17 Sept 2000.



Cave of crystals

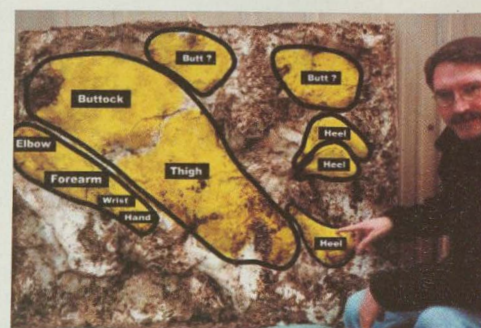
A spectacular cave of gypsum prisms was discovered in a disused Spanish silver mine at Almeria, on the Mediterranean, by geologist Javier Garcia-Guinea on 28 May. Up to 10 people can sit inside the geode – a rock cavity lined with crystalline deposits. Geodes are normally small enough to hold in your hand and this is by far the largest on record. It is 26ft (8m) long, 6ft (1.8m) wide and 6ft (1.8m) high. The crystals of gypsum – hydrous calcium sulphate – are about 1ft 8in (50cm) long.

The geode was probably formed about six million years ago when the sea evaporated, depositing thick layers of salts. Metro, 13 June; Adelaide Advertiser, 16 June 2000.

Bigfoot leaves his mark



THE BODY IMPRINT OF WHAT MIGHT BE A bigfoot was discovered on 22 September near Mount Adams by a Bigfoot Field Research Organization expedition (LeRoy Fish, Derek Randles, and Richard Noll) in the Gifford-Pinchot Forest, southern Washington State. The imprint of what appears to be a large animal's left forearm, hip, thigh, and heel is being studied by a team led by Jeff Meldrum, a professor of anthropology at Idaho State



University, who agree that it cannot be attributed to any commonly known Northwest animal. More than 200lb (90kg) of plaster were needed to produce the cast of the entire impression. Other evidence documented by the party includes voice recordings and 17in (43cm) footprints. Preliminary measurements indicate the body dimensions are 40%–50% greater than those of a 6ft (1.8m) tall human. [AP] 27 Oct 2000.



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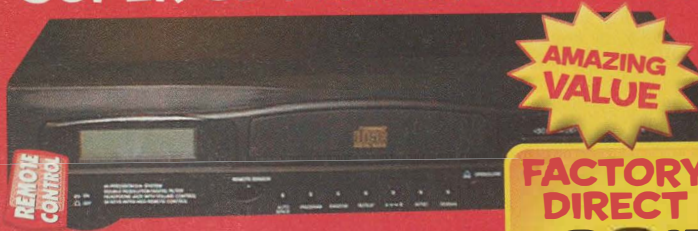
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Strange Days



Sticky Gecko feet

THE TOKAY GECKO – THE VICIOUS, FOOT-LONG, barking, red-spotted “Ferrari of the gecko world” – can scoot across ceilings and panes of glass because it has hairy feet, according to a recent report in *Nature* by biologists and engineers at the University of California, Berkeley. Its foot is covered with about half a million multi-branched spatulate hairs, or setae, each of which has a maximum adhesive force of around 200 microneutons. Because the distance between an individual seta and the surface is only one atom, van der Waal forces (a weak atomic attraction named after a Dutch Nobel Prize-winning physicist) come into play. The setae lose their ‘stickiness’ at an angle of 30 degrees (hence the lizard’s rolling walk), but if all were in contact with the surface at once, it could carry an 88lb (40kg) weight. The feet are self-cleaning and adhere in a vacuum or in water; engineers are hoping their research will lead to the development of a super-strong tape for use underwater and in outer space. The US Defence Department is interested in developing tiny, climbing robots (“geckobots”), and an adhesive tape for the consumer market has also been suggested. Other gecko species have feet adapted for different conditions – “sand shoes” for the desert and “bulldozer” toes for pushing pebbles. *Metro*, 8 June; *LA Times*, 15 June; *Business Week*, 26 June; *Scientific American*, August 2000.

Woman's hi-tech allergy



JOAN STOCK, 79, IS SO ALLERGIC TO microchips that she lives in a time-warp, unable to use most electrical equipment, or travel by public transport or in modern cars. Instead, she watches a black-and-white valve TV at her home at Saltford, near Bristol, and drives in a B-reg Ford Escort. The retired secretary's crippling headaches began 20 minutes after an electronic typewriter was introduced at the office where she worked in 1975.

Mrs Stock's condition, attributed to an extreme sensitivity to electromagnetic fields interfering with her brain's electrical pulses, is rare; but up to one in 100 people suffers from mild electrode sensitivity which can cause nausea and disorientation. She takes painkillers to get through the day and uses a Medigen, a small device which

dampens some of the effects, to enable her to go round her local supermarket.

Christine Moody, 78, of Southdown, near Bath, has also been allergic to electricity since being struck by lightning 20 years ago. She wears special chrome-lined shoes, but still finds walking over underground electricity cables painful. During electrical storms, she has to double-wrap herself in special blankets and wear rubber boots to protect herself; in spite of this, she was recently struck by lightning for a second time. Mrs Moody is also allergic to a number of foods, drugs and gas. *Western Morning Post*, 25 Aug; *Canberra Times*, 27 Aug; *D.Express*, *Evening Post*, 6 Sept; *Times*, 7 Sept; *Guardian*, 8 Sept; *Western Mail*, 11 Sept 2000 (For more people who are allergic to electricity see FT132:20).

Past life treasure hunt

JIM BETHE, 58, AN ANTIQUES DEALER FROM New York, underwent hypnotic regression in the 1990s and “remembered” a past life as a Welsh soldier from the Gower peninsula called John Seaman, born in 1779. Twenty years later, during a battle in India, Seaman raided the palace of the Sultan of Tippoo and stole a casket full of jewels. He killed two guards, but was stabbed in the back. (Mr Bethe bears on his back a birthmark which conforms to a scar made by a sword.)

Seaman came home to Swansea, hid his loot, and married Mary Merton in 1804 or 1805. Mary died in childbirth and their only child was killed by lightning at the age of five. Seaman returned to India, was recognised in Poona as a thief, set upon and left for dead. But he survived, went back to Europe and died at the battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Mr Bethe visited Wales for the first time in 1997 and found a cottage near Oxwich which he believed was once his home. With the help of a Welsh diviner, he located a site in Clyne Park, Swansea, where he thought his treasure chest was buried. Having obtained permission from the Swansea City Council, he dug down and unearthed the remains of a Victorian cesspit built some years after Seaman died. Undaunted, he turned his sights on the 131-acre Singleton Park, also in Swansea. He plans a second dig soon, which will be filmed by Activmedia, a Manchester-based production company, and beamed by satellite to America's ABC channel. An area of four square metres (13 sq ft) will be excavated. *FT* awaits developments with interest. *Western Mail*, 24 Aug, 1 Sept; *Guardian*, *D.Telegraph*, 25 Aug 2000.



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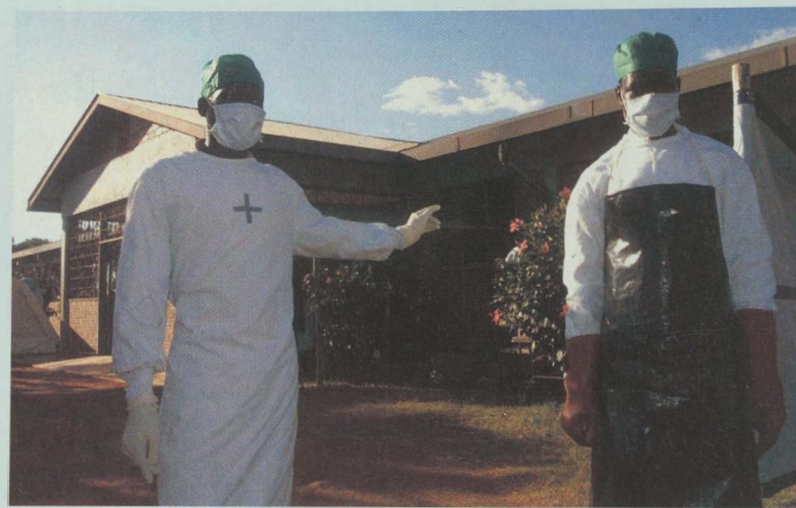


MEDICAL BAG



MEDICAL MARVELS FROM THE FILES OF FORTEAN TIMES

Amid fears that insecticide-resistant mozzies may bring malaria to America and Europe, mosquito-borne West Nile Fever strikes New York. Meanwhile, in Uganda, an epidemic of Ebola haemorrhagic fever breaks out.



OUTBREAK: Two Ugandan health workers outside an Ebola ward at St Mary's Hospital, Lacor.

BUGGIN' ME

Europe faces the prospect of a new viral plague – West Nile Fever (WNF), a type of encephalitis, relatively harmless to healthy people but dangerous to the vulnerable and elderly. During October, it killed 12 in Israel, a popular stop-off for migrating birds, from where it spread to Jordan and France. Currently, cases are being reported on America's East Coast where, last year, seven died in New York. As a result, the city's Central Park was quarantined and sprayed with powerful insecticides in an attempt to rid it of any possibly infected mosquitos.

The flavivirus is endemic throughout Africa and has a foothold in the Middle East and India, and it is coming our way. In 1997, at least 50 died in an outbreak that spread across Hungary and Romania. It is spread by migrating birds and the mosquitoes which feed on them and then bite people. It has also been found in cats, dogs and horses, though this is more rare.

Canadian authorities are so concerned they plan to stake out chicken runs along the US border as an early warning system. They are too late, says John Rappole of the Smithsonian Zoo in Virginia. The zoo's research suggests that an estimated 70 species of migratory birds already carry the WNF virus. "It is probably in every corner of North America by now," Rappole said (*Observer*, 24 Sept 2000).

This gloom was deepened by recent statements from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the US, that vast armies of insecticide-resistant mosquitoes are

recovering from their decimation in the last century and are spreading northwards, in Europe and America... and with them they bring the renewed prospect of malaria. Meanwhile, an epidemic of the world's most feared infectious disease – Ebola fever – continues to rage.

BLEEDING HELL

Esther Awete, aged 36, suffered a horrible death on 27 September in the Ugandan village of Kabadopong. In a raging fever, she was racked with muscle pains and bled continuously from her mouth, nose, eyes and anus till she died. Following custom, her body was kept in the hut for several days and visited by her friends and family. At her funeral, they bathed her body and buried her nearby. As they washed their hands in a communal basin, they were unaware that Esther was carrying the deadly Ebola virus.

Within five weeks, Esther's mother, three sisters and three other relatives were dead, and the virus had spread across a 15-mile (24km) radius in the remote district of Gulu, 225 miles (362km) north of Kampala, killing 105 people (by 11 November) and infecting more than 300 others, including some nurses. Doctors fear there are many more cases in remote villages. It spread to Mbarara in the far south of Uganda, where a soldier redeployed from Gulu died on 27 October. As the local custom is to divide the deceased's possessions among relatives, whole families have been struck down. Dr Matthew Lukwiya, medical director of the Lacor Mission Hospital in Gulu, said: "Eighty per cent of those who come in tell

you that they have lost people in their families, five or six for every one that comes in." Ebola – Ebola haemorrhagic fever (EHF) – is one of the most deadly of contagious diseases; as artery walls break down, blood, sweat, phlegm and excrement are ejected from the body. "It's like watching a patient melt in front of you," said a nurse. The virus was named after the Ebola River in the Congo, where around 400 people are known to have died in 1976 (*FT*82:10). Since then there have been six major outbreaks (including the latest in Uganda), of which the most serious were Sudan in 1976, where 284 died, and in Gabon at the end of 1996 (*FT*88:13), where 45 died. There are three known variants of EHF, lethal to humans – Ebola-Zaire (with the highest death rate), Ebola-Sudan, and Ebola-Ivory Coast. A fourth – Ebola-Reston – affects only monkeys.

The hair-like filovirus spreads through contact with bodily fluids and so can be limited, to some extent, by simple isolation nursing procedures, so education was one of the priorities of medical teams from the World Health Organisation and the US Centers for Disease Control which arrived there in the third week of October. Since then, the contagion seems to have been arrested.

While Esther Awete seems to be the first case in the latest epidemic, how she became infected is still unknown. One theory blames the Lord's Resistance Army, Zaire-based rebels known to operate in Gulu, but there have been no known deaths from Ebola among them.

Until recently, EHF was thought to be inevitably fatal. However, hope for an effective vaccine comes from the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases in Maryland (*Science*, March). They developed an experimental antibody which seems to have increased the chances of survival among mice given lethal levels of infection.

SOURCES

Anna Borzello in *Irish Times* 16 Oct; *Independent* 17 Oct; *Int. Herald Tribune* 20 Oct; Tim Butcher, 'Return of the Virus' in *D. Telegraph* 21 Oct; 10 Nov; *Guardian* 28 Oct; *Sunday Telegraph* 12 Nov 2000; + AP, AFP & Reuters reports.

RESOURCE

Institute for Molecular Virology epidemic watch www.bocklabs.wisc.edu/outbreak.html



Kangaroo capers ahoy

A berserk 'roo trashes a house in Australia, and another spooks golfers and dogs in Beckenham.

HOPPING MAD

A kangaroo smashed through a glass front door and terrorised a family in the mining town of Jabiru, in Australia's Northern Territory, during a three-hour rampage through their home. Dean Khan armed himself with an empty bourbon bottle to take on what he assumed was a human intruder when he was awoken by the crash of shattered glass shortly after midnight on 12 September.

Cut and bleeding, the 5ft 7in (17cm) kangaroo then bounded through the house and over an 11-year-old boy, one of five children in the house. The children's distraught mother Lisa Miller called police. Senior Constable Alistair Taylor said the house looked like the set of a horror movie. "There was blood and broken glass everywhere, blood all over the child's bed and up the walls, and a puppy was cowering terrified in a corner," he said. "If the kangaroo hadn't still been there, I wouldn't have believed it. The place would have been cordoned off as a crime scene and we'd be looking for a body."

Taylor and his partner spent the next two hours trying to coax the wounded animal out of the house and shunt it from room to room with a curtain rod and a rake. "It was hissing at us, rearing up at us boxing-like with its front paws," he said. "I've never seen a kangaroo do this before but it was trying to bite the curtain rod; it went absolutely berserk. When we got it outside, we threw a blanket over it and crashed-tackled it to the ground, but we had to let it go – it was too powerful."

The ordeal ended when police roped and hog-tied the animal and hustled it into a police car. The kangaroo was later destroyed. Taylor suspected the kangaroo had been chased to the inner-town street by dingoes. In Parliament, Environment Minister Rod Welford said kangaroos hopping through open doors was "one of life's vicissitudes". [*AAP*] *The Australian* (Melbourne), 13 Sept; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Sept 2000.

Last July, another kangaroo burst into the kitchen of Arnold Olsen in Toorbul, near Bribie Island in Queensland. It toppled a photocopier, thumped the stereo, and kicked a mirror in the bedroom until it fell off the wall. Finally, Mr Olsen, 50, managed to push it out the back door. *Sunday Mail* (Queensland), 23 July 2000.

THE BEAST OF BECKENHAM

October saw at least four sightings of a 6ft (1.8m) kangaroo nibbling on leaves near the golf course in 380-acre Beckenham Place Park, near Lewisham in south-east London. The park is no stranger to exotic wildlife. It has a huge colony of parrots which grew from a few birds released by their owner 20 years ago. Several escaped monkeys have turned up in the park over the years, as has a



cobra, dumped by its owner, and a circus camel, which ran amok in the 1970s.

The first kangaroo report came from a golfer on about 3 October, and the others mainly by elderly couples walking their dogs in the morning. One woman said that her dog had been kicked out of some bushes by the beast, probably hopping mad after the dog encroached on its territory. An alleged witness described the creature as "bloody gigantic", which lent weight to the belief that it was *Macropus giganteus*, an Eastern Grey kangaroo. The golf course management put up a sign warning the curious to be extremely careful around the potentially dangerous animal.

On 24 October, the story bounced out of the local papers and into the global news, with the discovery of alleged kangaroo prints near the 17th hole of the golf course. Photographs were taken to the Natural History Museum for identification, where they were initially described as belonging to a large animal "much bigger than a dog". Locals dubbed the creature the Beast of Beckenham. That night, Lewisham Mayor Dave Sullivan told reporters: "Our advice to anyone who sees this kangaroo is not to approach it. They can be territorial and are obviously very powerful animals."

As news crews gathered from around the world, they employed the latest technology – Akubra hats and kangaroo suits – in an attempt to lure the beast out of hiding. The golf club had high hopes for their new mascot: "We are hoping it could be something of a local Loch Ness Monster," said barman Michael Johnson, "it's been great publicity."

However, the RSPCA considered it more likely that the creature was a much smaller

wallaby, probably escaped from a private collection or zoo. There are several wallaby colonies around the country, the best known being the red-necked Tasmanian wallaby colony in Derbyshire's Peak District, founded in World War II. Despite fears that the colony had died out, Tim Harris, a geography lecturer at Staffordshire University, and one of his students, had a close encounter with one of the Peak wallabies on 11 October this year.

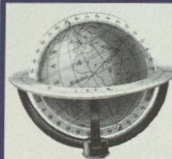
Meanwhile, in Scotland, a six-month-old wallaby escaped from Fife Animal Park on 6 October and was still on the run four nights later. It was believed to be in the grounds of Meadowells Farm in Collessie, bounding around in a field alongside sheep and Shetland ponies.

The last sighting of the Beckenham Beast was on 19 October by two elderly women walking near the Foxgrove Private Members Club next to the first green of the golf club. However, on 28 October the story came to something of a premature end. The council announced that the 2ft (60cm)-long prints were probably faked and certainly didn't match those of a kangaroo.

"If they were those of an animal, they were probably a dog's which had been extended by someone trying to con us using their hand or heel," said councillor Adrian Wardle. "No one has come forward still to say they have actually seen the creature or their dog was attacked by it. All the reports are second- or third-hand. The evidence is so thin as to be non-existent." *FT* suspects that this phantom critter will be popping up again in the near future. *Times*, 24+28 Oct; *Guardian*, *D. Mail*, *D. Express*, 25 Oct 2000. *Wallabies*: *Metro*, 10 Oct; *Stoke Sentinel*, 11+14 Oct 2000.



Strange Days



Classical Corner

A continuing series of forteana from the ancient world, compiled by Barry Baldwin

10 CLASSIC COINCIDENCES

Fort (Books, p846-50) collected examples of "alleged pseudo-relationships that are called coincidences", observing "in the explanation of coincidences there is much of laziness and helplessness."

Fort was neither lazy nor helpless, but stories develop lives of their own. D Wallechinsky, with I and A Wallace (*The Book of Lists*, Bantam Books, New York, 1977, p463), presents "the greatest series of coincidences in history": three times (in 1664, 1785 and 1860) a ship has sunk in the Menai Straits, always on 5 December with one survivor called Hugh Williams.

Stirring stuff. Yet turn to Ian Skidmore (*Anglesey & Llyn Shipwrecks*, Christopher Davies, Swansea, 1979, p38) and we are in for a let-down: these wrecks occurred on 10 December 1664, 5 December 1785, and 5 August 1820 - Hugh Williams remains but the day coincidence has gone and the third year is different.

A J Woodman (*Tacitus Reviewed*, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp16-7) reproduces the Wallechinsky-Wallaces' version to show that "history does tend to repeat itself, often in the most curious details".

If we believe Aelian (*Historical Miscellany*, bk2 ch24), the Graeco-Persian battles of Artemisium, Marathon, Mycale, and Plataea all happened on 6 May within a 12-year span. Herodotus (*Histories*, bk7 ch167) locates two unco-ordinated victories by mainland and Sicilian Greeks over separate enemies in 480BC on the same day.

The fourth-century historian Eunapius (fri) derides authors who collected such synchronies, thereby showing there was an ancient market for and controversy over them. We may lift an eyebrow over (for instance) the eating alive by dogs, some 600 years apart, of two notoriously irreligious writers, Euripides and Lucian. Or smile at the names of two Roman generals fighting a civil war in AD193, Albinus and Niger (White versus Black).

The following (except where otherwise specified) come from book seven of Pliny's *Natural History*. Over five centuries of the Roman Republic, the generals Dentatus, Capitolinus and (Livy, *History*, bk45 ch39 para16) Geminus were all wounded 23 times, while Caesar (Suetonius, *Life*, ch82 para2) succumbed to 23 stab wounds on the Ides. Sophocles and Dionysius - Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights*, bk3 ch15) adds Philemon - died upon hearing they'd won the Athenian drama festival. The poet Antipater had an annual fever, always and only on his birthday. Statues of Jupiter in Greece and Italy were struck by lightning the same day. Two officials called Caesar died the same morning in different cities while putting on their shoes. Two Roman knights separately expired in bed with the same boy friend. Most fortean is the younger Pliny's account (*Letters*, bk7 no27 para12) of how two of his staff woke up to find their hair mysteriously cut in the night.

Modern scholars themselves engender oddities. A J Ayer, E R Dodds and Mortimer Wheeler all describe different encounters with different prostitutes whose charms each one spurned. One of my school Classics masters was nicknamed Bunny. When I went up to university to read that subject, one of the lecturers was also Bunny - but I must not rabbit on.

50 years ago this month

January 1951

Peter Hassall, our correspondent in New Zealand, begins a new series of monthly fortean notes, presenting a view of the world from the Antipodes 50 years ago.



Brits and Aussies get smashed

The year had a smashing start - on 1 January a falling ice chunk punched a 3-ft square (0.9m²) hole in the roof of a house in Windsor, England. The ice falls actually started on 10 November 1950, with an Exmoor sheep killed in a repeat of a 1910 fall, and a record 121b (51kg) chunk fell at Helensburgh, Dumbarton, Scotland, on 26 December 1950.¹

Even more bizarre was a falling 6ft (1.8m) icicle, which allegedly killed a carpenter at Kempton, Germany, on 10 January!² Perhaps it fell from a building? Can FT's German readers help us find out?

In late January, chickens were killed and cattle injured by giant hailstones in New South Wales, Australia. Annoyingly vague newspaper accounts give no sizes.³

Another one bites the dust

Bernard Heuvelmans' 1968 cryptozoological classic *In The Wake of the Sea Serpents* chronicled 58 examples of stranded sea monsters, most of which were misidentified dead examples of known animals (for instance, basking sharks).

To his examples can be added a 30ft (9m) long carcass washed up on the remote Waimarama coast near Hastings, New Zealand, about 10 January 1951. The skeletal remains included a 3.5ft (1m) wide head and 3ft (0.9m) long tusk. It was speculated that a deep marine disturbance one month⁴ or several days⁵ previously had killed the creature. Don't you just love accurate reporting?

On the following day it was disclosed that the 'tusk' was actually a beaked snout. According to naturalists Dr W M Moore and Dr K E Crompton,

the remains were those of a beaked whale.⁶

Mrs F O Bryce recalled seeing a 15ft-long (4.5m) beaked whale in Polorus Sound on 3 January.⁷ Usually sightings and strandings bring earlier reports of monsters out of the woodwork. Scientists typically criticise the witnesses, funnily enough, none objected to this conventional sighting backing up their explanation - double standards, anyone? Also, if anything, witnesses exaggerate the size of what they see; yet Mrs Bryce's beaked whale was only half the length of the carcass. Beaked whales are uncommon in New Zealand coastal waters, but it seems unlikely that the one she sighted was the one which had died.

Caterpillar invasion

Early in the month, millions of caterpillars invaded Narrabri, 280 miles (450km) north-west of Sydney. The local council resorted to chemical warfare to assist the heavily-outnumbered human population of 3,500.⁸ Fort jokingly suggested mass swarms of insects and other animals were caused by natural teleportation gone wrong. Modern conventional thinking explains them as migrations or population explosions during breeding periods.

Unghost before uncon

The spirit of Catherine Howard (the beheaded fifth wife of Henry VIII) is popularly believed to haunt Hampton Court Palace. Despite the best efforts of a BBC documentary crew - who created an eerie atmosphere with mood lighting - she was a no-show. Cameras followed the path Catherine took from her bed chamber to the oratory, where she pleaded in vain for her life, but her shade remained camera-shy.⁹ Better luck next century, lads!

Sources

1. Wilkins, Harold T. *Flying saucers On The Attack* (Ace, NY, 1967), pp93-95.
2. *Ibid*, p95.
3. *The Dominion* (Wellington, NZ), 24 Jan 1951.
4. *The Dominion* (Wellington, NZ), 11 Jan 1951.
5. *The Evening Post* (Wellington, NZ), 11 Jan 1951.
6. *The Dominion* (Wellington, NZ), 12 Jan 1951.
7. *Ibid*, 13 Jan 1951.
8. *Ibid*, 12 Jan 1951 [FT, 6:21-22 and FT 29:23, 24 detail other caterpillar swarms].
9. *Ibid*, 13 Jan 1951.

If you'd like to contribute to Peter Hassall's 'Fifty Years Ago' archive and broaden it to cover the rest of the world, write to him at PO Box 27432, Marion Square, Wellington 1, New Zealand or email rowlf@paradise.net.nz.

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KARL SHUKER'S
**alien
ZOO****KOKAKO 2000**

On 17 October, ecologist Rhys Buckingham began the most extensive search ever for one of New Zealand's most elusive birds, the South Island kokako. Distinguished from its North Island counterpart by its orange-and-blue wattles (North Island kokakos are entirely blue), this endemic has been written off as extinct, but spasmodic reports of its very distinctive bell-like call inspired Buckingham to seek it with such diligence that in June he was awarded NZ's Order of Merit. This latest search, dubbed 'Kokako 2000' and planned to last four months, is sponsored by the Ecologic Foundation, the Dept of Conservation, several major NZ companies and private donations. It begins in a region of the Kahurangi National Park, and its participants are armed with digital audio and photographic equipment. They will also be seeking feathers for DNA tests. *Nelson Mail*, 5 Oct; *Christchurch Press*, 6 Oct 2000.

OFF TO THE CONGO

I recently learned from Adam Davies of the 'Dinozoo' team that the expedition to search for the mokele-mbembe (see FT125:8) would set off in mid-November for a month-long foray around Lake Tele in the People's Republic of the Congo. Among the Congolese contingent is Dr Marcellin Agnagna from Brazzaville's Parc de Zoologie. The British team hopes to be home by Christmas. *Adam Davies, pers. comm.*, 3 Nov 2000.

A FLURRY OF PHASCOGALES

Years ago, a colleague told me that researchers would eventually identify mammals not with a field guide but rather with a DNA analysis kit. That time seems to have arrived. In June, Dr Peter Spencer at Australia's Marsupial Co-operative Research Centre announced that this technique has shown that the brush-tailed phascogale, an arboreal marsupial carnivore, was not a single widely-distributed species. Instead, it was three taxonomically distinct species – one inhabiting eastern Australia, one in western Australia, and one in northern Australia. Despite their outward similarity, these species had been genetically separate for over three million years. *The Australian*, 1 June 2000.

Kali's tantric tiger killing?

Locked up, behind bars, surrounded by other tigers – what could possibly go wrong?



TROUBLED TIGER: Nikhil, Sakhi's twin brother, who has not eaten since the killing.

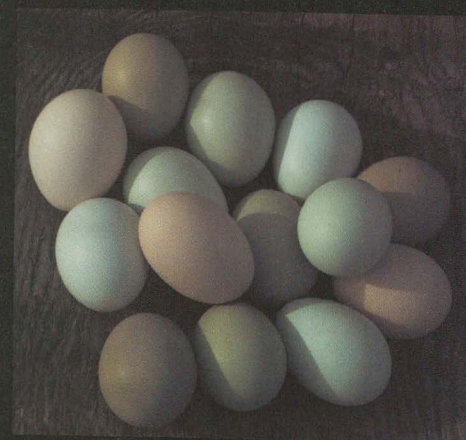
ON 5 OCTOBER, A YOUNG ROYAL Bengal tigress, 13-month-old Sakhi, was killed as she was sleeping in her night-time enclosure in the Nehru Zoo in Hyderabad, capital of the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Zoo staff found the lock on her cell broken and her skinned carcass floating in a water tank. Her jugular vein had been slit. Initially it was thought that she had been killed by poachers for her skin, but her nails, which fetch almost as much money as the pelt, had not been taken.

Zoo authorities now believe that the killing, which occurred on the last day of the festival of Kali – the bloodthirsty goddess to whom animal sacrifices are offered – had been commissioned by a group of wealthy people as the climax to a 108-day tantric ritual. Sakhi's mother, Karuna, and twin brother, Nikhil, who sleep in cages adjoining Sakhi's, as well as the 11 other tigers in the night-time compound, seemed terrified and were refusing to eat.

Atal Behari Vajpayee, India's

Prime Minister, called for a report into the killing, four zoo staff members were suspended and a reward of more than £4,000 was offered for information leading to a conviction. Project Tiger, India's flagship conservation agency which brought the plight of India's tigers to the world's attention, insists that it is not responsible for zoo animals, which are managed by India's Zoo Authority, and refuses to discuss Sakhi's death, despite calls for it to be disbanded. *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 Oct 2000.

Green, pink, blue eggs and ham



THESE DELICATELY HUED eggs – pink, beige, blue and green – were laid by Farmer Philip Lee-Woolf's hens, known as Old Cotswold Legbars, descendants of Chilean araucano hens. He keeps 3,000 free-range birds at his farm in Broadway, near Cheltenham. What causes the subtle colours in unknown. The original Chilean hens came over in the 1920s. Botanist Clarence

Elliott, on a tour of Patagonia, put three hens and a cockerel on a ship back to Britain. Because of a misunderstanding, the ship's cook turned the cockerel into stew, so back in Stow-on-the-Wold, Gloucestershire, the hens were mated with a different breed – the gold-pencilled Hamborough. However, the coloured eggs continued. *D.Mail*, 23 Oct 2000.

A compendium of fishy tales

Pike brained by golfer, some piscine training, and a fish-flinging eco activist...

Golfer bags pike

When Brian Farley, a 50-year-old florist from Bournemouth, launched his golfball from the 11th tee towards the water trap, he expected it to disappear in the murky depths; but instead of plopping into the small lake, the ball bounced out of the reeds and landed just yards from the green. It was only when he found the corpse of a 6lb 8oz (3kg) pike floating in the water with a golfball-size dent in its head that he realised what had happened.

Mr Farley was able to finish the hole in three shots before slinging the dead fish over his golf bag and heading back to the clubhouse. The club – at Canford Magna, near Wimbourne, Dorset – has displayed the head of the fish alongside the killer golf ball. The rest Mr Farley took home, where it saved him the price of five days' catfood. Stuart Hudson, a director at the golf course, who thought the fish might have been washed into the lake by a recent flood, said Mr Farley's fellow golfers had viewed his account as a decidedly fishy tale – until they compared the ball with the dent in the pike's head. *Times*, *D.Telegraph*, 22 Sept 2000.

Trout intelligence

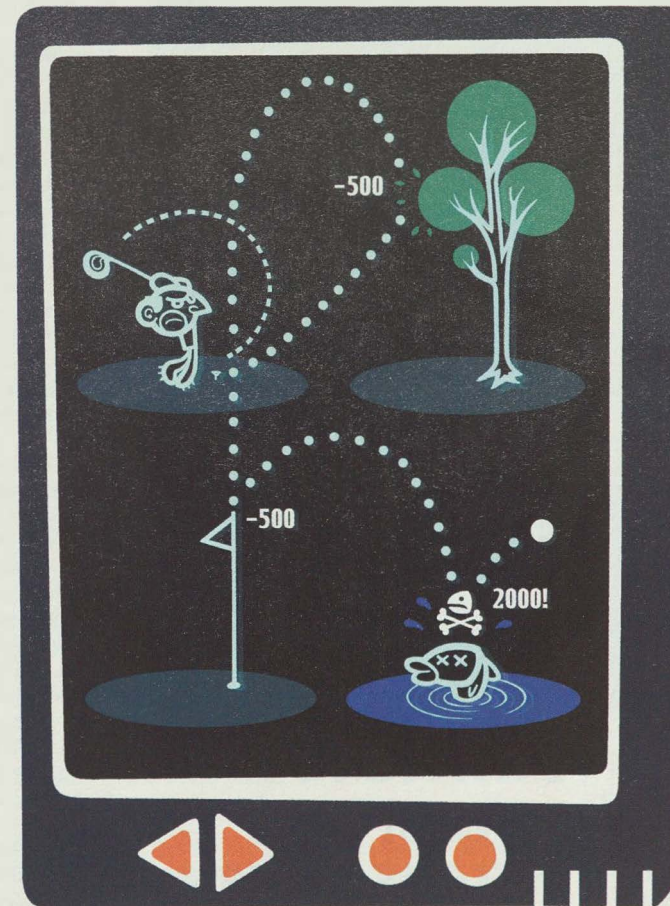
New Zealand brown trout have learned to avoid getting caught twice, according to scientists at the Cawthorne Institute, in Nelson. Three-day fishing trips were organised to two stretches of river with similar numbers of fish, one popular with fishermen, the other remote. On day one, 58 were caught and tagged at the popular stretch, compared with 157 on the less-fished river. On day two, those caught at a remote stretch were untagged, and on day three, hardly any were caught.

The New Zealand government agency which commissioned the research may now reconsider its self-defeating 'catch and throw back' policy. However, Basil (named after the owner of Fawley Towers), a 47lb 8oz (21.5kg) "quiet, good-natured" carp living in a lake at Yateley, near Camberley in Surrey, has been caught at least 58 times since 1975. Carp are generally respected by fisherman for their cunning.

Other researchers at Plymouth University's

Institute of Marine Studies have found that fish can be trained to recognise feeding calls so they can be 'herded'.

They are planning to release 10,000 bass into the open sea and feed them regularly until they are large enough to be worth catching. *Irish Times*, 22 Aug; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, *Metro*, 24 Aug; *Metro*, 4 Sept 2000.

**Fishy protest**

Randall Mark, 20, of Moscow, Idaho, has been charged with throwing salmon at Representative Helen Chenoweth-Hage during a congressional hearing at the University of Montana looking into a number of wildfires in Montana and Idaho over the summer.

Mark appeared in court on 9 November to plead guilty to lobbing a pattie of tinned salmon at the congresswoman to protest at her view that the fires were the result of insufficient timber cutting in national forests. Although Chenoweth-Hage was not injured in any way, the hearing had to go into recess while she removed the offending fish from her hair and clothes. Mark could receive up to a year in prison when he is sentenced on 6 February 2001. *CNEWS* 10 Nov 2000.

KARL SHUKER'S
**alien
ZOO****ANOTHER NEW PHYLUM!**

Marine biologist Dr Reinhardt Kristensen is already immortalised in zoological circles for discovering two new species each so different from all others that two entirely new animal phyla – Loricifera and Cycliophora – had to be created to house them. It seems he has achieved an incredible taxonomic hat-trick. He and co-worker Dr Peter Funch recently described a minute aquatic invertebrate, dubbed *Limnognathia maerski*, from western Greenland's Disko Island, with complex jaws, which they have assigned to a new taxonomic class, *Micrognathozoa*, but of presently undetermined phylum. As it seems to be a missing link between two separate phyla (Rotifera and Gnathostomulida), Kristensen feels that it deserves its own phylum. *Journal of Morphology*, vol. 246 (2000); Dr Reinhardt Kristensen, many pers. comms, Nov 1999–Nov 2000.

ROPING IN ANOTHER ROPEN

In FT133, I mentioned Bill Gibbons's planned search for a hitherto obscure cryptid, the pterosaur-like ropen of New Guinea. Recently, Bill revealed that there are two versions. The 'true' ropen occurs on the small island of Rambunzo, off the east coast of Papua New Guinea, in the Bismarck Archipelago, but is known to the natives in mainland Papua and the Solomon Islands too. Its wingspan is three to four feet, its long beak is filled with teeth, and its lengthy tail terminates in a diamond-shaped flange. It frequents caves, but is attracted by the smell of decaying human flesh, and has been known to attack funeral gatherings – as witnessed by western missionaries, who also saw them on fishing trips at night along the coast. They sometimes attack native fishing vessels, snatching fishes from the nets. The ropen's mainland Papuan counterpart is the duah, which is much bigger, with a wingspan of up to 20ft. In 1995, the villagers of Gumalong allegedly saw a duah fly from Mount Bel and down over the jungle valley, before heading out to sea. Its underparts reputedly glow, and it is said to resemble *Pteranodon*, a giant prehistoric pterosaur. *Bill Gibbons, cz@egroups.com* 22 Oct 2000.



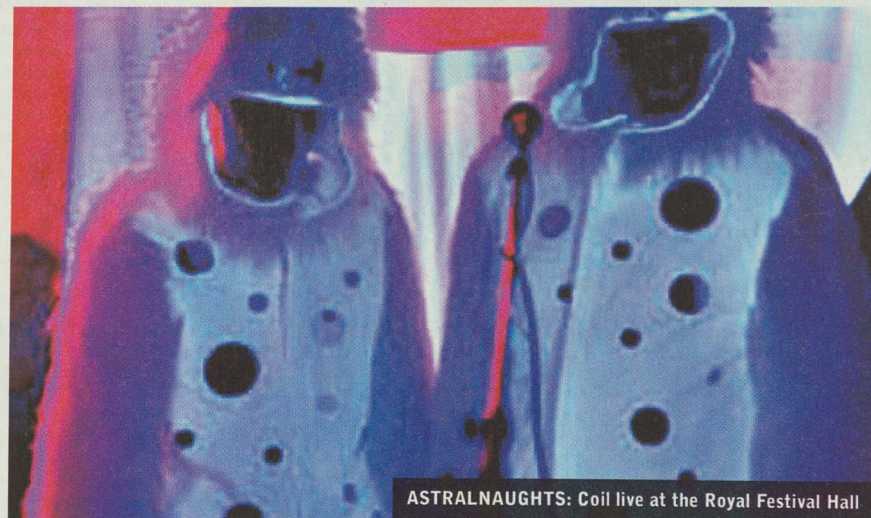
Sounds of Blakeness

For over 15 years John Balance and Peter 'Sleazy' Christopherson of Coil, accompanied by numerous collaborators, have used sound to explore the fringes of what is known. Through their music, they ride the English visionary mystical current previously investigated by the likes of John Dee, William Blake, Aleister Crowley and Austin Osman Spare.

Coil's music is in a state of constant flux, ranging from the subtly inductive to the abrasive and confrontational. Their most recent

releases – the deeply affecting, hypnotic tonal shifts of *Time Machines* and the crackling, ætheric, melodic electronics on *Musick to Play in the Dark, Vols 1& 2* – can all be recommended unreservedly to those with more precarious musical tastes.

Surrounded by original Austin Spare and Aleister Crowley paintings, MARK PILKINGTON spoke with John Balance over a glass of Coil's favourite tippie, the King's Piss, at their home in the farther reaches of the West Country.



ASTRALNAUGHTS: Coil live at the Royal Festival Hall

The album *Worship the Glitch* is jointly credited to Coil and ElpH. What was ElpH? Coil work under a number of pseudonyms (Eskaton, Black Light District etc), but when we entered into the ElpH project, we felt compelled to do it... it was strange. Normally we have a musical reference; we say: "Let's do an album in the style of Cluster" (a German '70s electronic drone group), then we'll approximate it and go off at a tangent. But with ElpH, the three of us – myself Peter, and Drew McDowell – really felt that we were receiving extraterrestrial messages and we just went with it. The sound was designed by whoever – or whatever – was coming through us. Throughout, the William Burroughs phrase "Stars splash the silver, answer back" was behind the recording session. We did it in a week, and for that week, it was as if the transmission was in full flow. At the end of the week it stopped, and we haven't got it back since, which is why we haven't done another ElpH album. We keep hoping that they – whatever it was – will contact us again, because we really want to do one. Maybe it was a one-off.

I WROTE TO THE KING OF THE WITCHES WHEN I WAS 14

Did you ever try to contact it through channelling or anything like that?

I'm very wary of channelling, although, having studied magick, I do know how to banish and protect. I think channelling can be very dangerous; several acquaintances have had negative experiences with it... Having said that, I might consider it in the right circumstances.

Perhaps your equipment was somehow picking this up?

I don't know. It didn't feel like an electrical transmission at all – it felt very fluid. It could have been something earthbound,

rather than extraterrestrial. An earth spirit or something like that.

Where were you recording?

In Chiswick! The notorious Chiswick goblins at work!

How has magick seeped into your music?

Totally. I've always been into magick, using Crowley's 'k' to differentiate it from stage magick, and studied it. I tried to buy stuff by Crowley when I was young, but my parents refused to have anything to do with it and actively discouraged me. I wrote to Alex Sanders (self-styled 'King of the Witches'), when I was 14; he wrote back to me saying thanks for writing, I'm very pleased that you want to do this, but can you write back when you're 18? He wouldn't accept anyone so young into his coven. I used to worship the moon and encourage other boys at school to do it too. I instinctively did things like that.

So there was no specific point when you started practising magick?

No, even as a kid I used to do it. I manufactured little plasticine gods and made offerings to them. I was just born with a pagan sensibility. I'm an animal. There's no difference between animals and humans to me – I think that's one of the signs of a true pagan. I think some life experiences can jolt you into it. I had German measles really badly – twice I think – and wasn't allowed contact with the light in case I went blind. Being shut in a dark room was my initiation, I imagine.

Was Alex Sanders your first contact with structured magickal techniques?

I'd say Max Ernst was, very obliquely – he was certainly shamanic. That's when I realised there were a few magickal people around. Up until that point, the only time I encountered witchcraft was when Anglia Television reported horror stories about covens being linked to people's disappearances. That's when I realised how biased the media were towards magick, but it served to push me further in that direction. Every time I came across an obstacle, I became more determined in my belief that this was the correct way to proceed with my life and work.

I went to university, but left after a term and joined Psychic Television [early '80s experimental band formed by Genesis P Orridge and Peter Christopherson of Throbbing Gristle]. Through TG, I was introduced to William Burroughs and the

general concept of magick as a practicality in everyday life. Then in PTV we began to actively explore magick as a group and play with it, provocatively and perhaps dangerously. And when that soured, divided, and became too complicated, I decided to do my own group, Coil. As soon as I discovered Austin Spare, I realised we were loners. We practice magick on our own. That's my style of magick, the shamanic way – and Spare was definitely a shaman.

So there's a distinction to be made between the more ritualised magickal path of Psychic TV – perhaps more in the Western tradition – and your own more intuitive approach?

Well, the core of people in PTV were shamanic – Genesis is definitely, concretising ideas from various traditions – but we assumed the mantle of organised religion, copying aspects of The Process Church (see FT134), Jim Jones and actual clerical stuff. We came across as a cult, but we were, in fact, individually practicing sexual magick. That was a camouflage which eventually became a trap I felt very strongly we had to break away from.

There was a lot of negative attention to the cult-like aspects of that scene. Was that something that you tried to evade, or did you play on it?

We originally played on it, to be honest, and at that time, you could. It was only later – when Thatcher came to power, the government started introducing repressive law reforms and the 'video nasty' panic began – that what we were playing with became more dangerous and serious to be associated with. For our own good, then, we had to dissociate ourselves from all that.

When Gen got raided by the police in 1992 (removing a huge archive of rare material – see FT64:50), his response was to go to America. We weren't raided, but we lived in fear, as we had equal reason to be targeted at the time. We had to clear our house of anything which could be found in any way provocative. It was horrible, absolutely awful. I felt terrible for him, but Gen had a break and was allowed to move on, whereas we lived in fear for five years, never knowing whether the consequence of things that we had done quite innocently and legally might rebound on us.

Psychodelics must have transformed the way you approached sound, ultimately inspiring the *Time Machines* project.

They did more than that. I was taking magick mushrooms from the age of 11. They always taught me wonderful things, like how to appreciate music, and eventually they told me to make it. I feel I was brought up by mushrooms – they are teachers. *Time Machines* is explicitly to do with combining sounds and tones to produce psychodelic effects. The Harmaline alkaloid, like any complex compound, is represented diagram-



MUSHROOMS TAUGHT ME HOW TO APPRECIATE MUSIC

matically as a ring, but when you take DMT, yage or ayahuasca, you also hear a ringing, psychic tone. With DMT, there's also a kind of crumpling sound. *Time Machines* was inspired by Terence McKenna's idea that time machines will return to us from the future.

So the intention was to create a sonic time machine?

Yeah, but you don't have to be on the drugs mentioned on *Time Machines* for it to work. It's an attempt to recreate some of these psychodelic states using sound. We did extensive research, testing whether these tones would actually transport you; the ones that did, we titled and put on the record.

There were some drugs, like Hecate, I'd not come across before. Was this an Alexander Shulgin creation?

Probably, though we got it off Spiral Tribe (an early '90s travelling 'rave' community), who called it DOET. It's a very strange compound. We took it several times in Thailand. You get the usual euphoria and a heightened sense of awareness of the luminous majesty of everything. We were in Chiang Mai, a town in North Thailand, originally a walled city with a moat around it. We were standing beside the

moat, and as the layers of time stripped away, the ramparts crumbled and became bare fields again. That's where the whole time travel thing came from. But if you went further on DOET you found nothingness, your sensory input would meet this absolute nothing, not even a 'void', which gives it a name, just a greyness. Then you came back and it was an hour later. Very strange.

A sort of sensory overload, like white noise?

Yeah, it was like that. We're tempted to do a five-CD *Time Machines* box set, with a whole CD dedicated to each tone. The whole thing would be dedicated to psilocybin. It's a very benign substance. I'm an admirer of mushrooms. A mycophilic. Did you see that programme on lemurs recently? One of them had a big poisonous centipede which it kept putting it into its mouth and chewing. This lemur was clearly tripping out! Its eyes were rolling back and it almost fell out of the tree. It kept doing it over and over again... I wish William Burroughs had seen that – I'll have to tell him in a dream.

On dreams, scientists monitoring sleeping birds' brains have found that they practise their songs in their sleep. How important are dreams to your music?

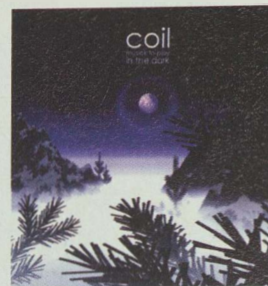
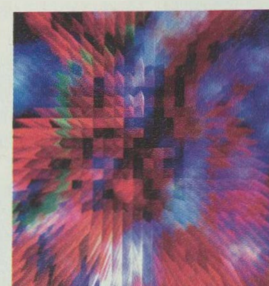
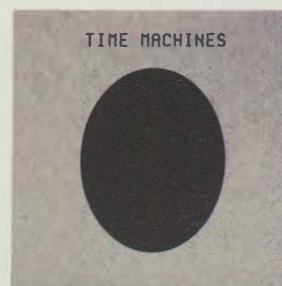
I lucid-dream all the time. Through astral projection, I learned to do it at will. And now I don't astrally project anymore, but I reckon one out of three dreams I have is lucid. It's quite exhausting. It's not like sleeping – you've been talking to people all night. I've also had situations where I've been dreaming in my house, and the layout is exactly the same, not distorted like in a dream. And I've asked myself, "Is this a dream?", at which point I've leapt up into the air and taken off. There's a huge sense of euphoria when you start floating around. I like to show off like that in my dreams!

Ever experienced precognitive dreams?

No, but – and this is absolutely true – our first album, back in 1985, was going to be called 'Funeral Music for Princess Diana'. That was based on a dream I had. I was sure she was going to die prematurely. I can't remember how she died in the dream, but I don't think it was a car crash.

Can you tell us a little about your relationship with Austin Spare [a highly influential artist and occultist who will be featured in FT 144 with rare pictures from Coil's collection].

Well, I have a very intimate relationship with Spare – he's my mentor. I communicate with him through his pictures and often ask his advice, as an ancestor. A lot of his beliefs were shamanic and to do with ancestor worship. I don't have a very close connection with my ancestors, my real family, other than my mother's parents. So I talk to Spare for advice. I think he still exists, in his art and in the æther. He's around as a helper. Sounds a



UNWOUND: John Balance (right), live at the Royal Festival Hall.

bit flaky doesn't it... maybe I should couch it in cyber terms! Although Spare's paintings are often decorative, the intention behind the decoration often hits you first. Most people who come into contact with Spare's work come away from it with something positive. There's a massive power there. He imprinted each picture with a power, purposefully. Some more than others, but they all have a power that transmits to you, definitely. You can commune with them and they change. You look at some of the chaotic ones with one person and see certain things, and you look at them with another person and you see a completely different set of things. They resonate.

Like Burroughs or Spare, we see no difference between our philosophy, our lifestyle and our art. We are what we do. What Spare did in art, we try to do through music. This is why we do sidereal sound.

We try to do with sound what he with his pictures, twisting them so that the geometry appears warped, to produce strange geometries through sound, so that it comes through sideways. We do it with technology, with 3D devices, phasers, out-of-phasers, all sorts of gizmos. There's no one particular box that does it, we all do it any possible way that we can.

When we play our next gig in France (at the Montreux Jazz Festival), we'll hopefully be using quadraphonic sound. Spare used to do speaker battles where he would project sound into the æther – which I think is a real physical thing, some kind of cosmic glue, a genuine substance, or non-substance – to connect everything and allow ideas, even things, to be transmitted.

Your recent live performances at the Royal Festival Hall were powerful, both physically and mentally. How do you go about creating something like that?

We try to put magick in the music and we do a lot of preparation, from finding the right frequencies on the modular synthesizers to using the right incense and the right colours on the screen. We usually take stuff from Crowley's book of magickal correspondences, 777, and mix it with intuition and research.

It's powerful, but we definitely don't aim

WE DEFINITELY DON'T AIM TO INJURE

to injure! In Thailand, we came across a drug rehabilitation unit that was also for psychiatric patients. They use loud noises to exorcise the spirits – they amplify buzz saws with speakers and bang gongs. They completely freak people out, but they do it to banish spirits. At our last gig ('Constant Shallowness Leads to Evil'), we were attempting to do that. We want to do bigger versions to really shake the bad stuff out.

How about Electronic Voice Phenomena, have you ever experimented with that?

No. We buy old tape recorders and use the messages we find on them, which is different – I'm interested in found sounds, as opposed to found objects, like Burroughs was. Some people pick up radio waves through fillings in their teeth, and nowadays everybody's brains must be completely scrambled by mobile phones. What we're trying to do in concert, almost, is to blank this out through the use of white strobe lighting, white noise and video projections. Hopefully, we can provide some sort of safe area and allow people to be themselves in that particular time and space. Outside you just can't avoid visual pollution from advertising, noise pollution, both audible and inaudible, microwaves – that's what we're trying to negate.

A lot of people would describe your music as dark, though it's less so now – you're letting in the light. Is that a conscious decision?

Well, it's partly age, though I'm not mellowing – I'm getting angrier, if anything. "A complete derangement of the senses", as Rimbaud called it, was what I used to aim for. I was much more into chaos, punishment almost. If I stayed up, I'd stay up for five days; if I did live performance, it would involve blood enemas and cutting myself. I realised that it's OK to do that; but we want-



LIVE PAULIE: MUTH RAYE

ed to make music that would take people places, be more constructive, if you like, for myself and others. I was literally destroying myself in creating these things. Certainly, making the *Love's Secret Domain* (1990) album was very, very heavy, drug-wise and in all sorts of other ways. So we thought: let's try to do music that's more healing or holistic, but not in a New Age way. It can still involve noise and abrasion, but the intention behind it is healing – it's a different approach really. I wouldn't say we'd mellowed.

We like to think of what we're doing now as Moon Musick. When we lived in Chiswick, by the Thames, we became very aware of the tidality of the river and went there every evening. So we switched into a lunar phase and decided to move to the sea. The first thing we did, *How to Destroy Angels*, was a conjuration of Martian energy – male, homosexual energy. People claimed that it was misogynist, and *Rough Trade* almost didn't stock it – a controversy in a tea cup. But now we're very moon-oriented. Arabic culture uses a lunar calendar (they have moon letters and sun letters), and the pre-Christian Celts also used a lunar calendar – it's much more natural. I'm on a mission to put the moon back into perspective. So like Sun Ra came from Saturn, we, at the moment are at the moon. Maybe we'll reach Saturn one day.

For sound clips and more information about Coil, visit <http://www.brainwashed.com/coil>

The full-length interview will be available soon at <http://www.forteantimes.com>

Recommended Coil releases: *Black Light District*, *Worship the Glitch*, *Time Machines*, *Astral Disaster*, *Musick to Play in the Dark Vols 1 & 2*

Christmas stocking fella

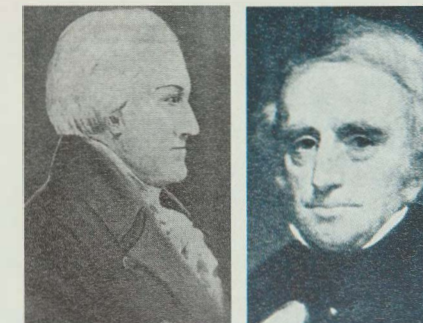
Academic suggests that Santa's little helper was a gentleman not a scholar

EVERY CHRISTMAS FOR MORE THAN 150 YEARS children have hung their stockings by the chimney and thanked Clement Clarke Moore for the tradition. Moore, a wealthy Manhattan biblical scholar, went down in history as the man who created the American image of Santa Claus as author of *Account of a Visit from St Nicholas*, better known as *The Night Before Christmas*. The poem helped recast St Nicholas as a jovial elf and turn Christmas into a time for giving gifts to children:

*'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar plums danced in their heads; [etc]*

In a new book, *Author Unknown* (Henry Holt & Co), Don Foster, an English professor at Vassar College, argues that the poem, first published anonymously in a Troy, NY, newspaper in 1823, closely matches the views and verse of Henry Livingston Jr, a gentleman-poet of Dutch descent from Poughkeepsie, NY, who died before Moore was ever named as the poem's author. It was not until 1844, when the poem's popularity had spread through reprinting around the country, that Moore stepped forward as the author, explaining that his long silence stemmed from embarrassment over what he called his trifle. Livingston's family immediately denied the claim and have been fighting their corner ever since.

According to Foster, Moore was too much of a grouch to write such a playful poem. In other Christmas poems he admonished his own children to be humble and aloof from traditional pleasures. The poem's St Nicholas enjoys a pipe, while Moore railed against tobacco as "opium's treacherous aid". Writing out the poem by hand later in life, Moore mis-

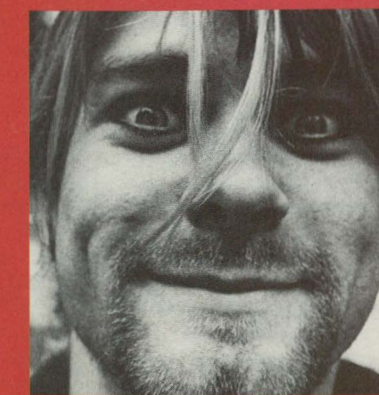


Gentleman-poet Livingston, and scholar Moore.

stated the names of Santa's last two reindeer. He followed a printer's error that made them "Donder and Blitzen" instead of the Dutch-American words "Dunder" and "Blixem", meaning thunder and lightning. Moore spoke German, but not Dutch. "People called the first version a misprint, but to a Dutchman like Livingston it was exactly right," said Foster.

Historians say the idea of Moore's authorship first surfaced in 1837, when his friend Charles Fenno Hoffman floated the notion. But Foster argues that Hoffman had the wrong poem in mind. The other poem, *Old Santa Claus*, appeared anonymously in a pamphlet in 1821. Foster's textual analysis shows that the latter poem has several of the hallmarks of Moore's writing; and four stanzas are devoted to castigating naughty children. In 1844, at his family's behest, Moore finally took credit for the more famous poem, including it without fanfare in a collection of his more solemn verses. He wrote out four copies of the poem in later life, one of which was bought for \$211,000 in an auction at Christies in 1997 by Seth Kaller, a New York antiquarian, who is naturally averse to the revised attribution.

Looks like teen spirit...



GEMMA FRANKS, 24, OF COLCHESTER, SHUT her computer down after visiting a Kurt Cobain web site. She noticed a "distinct, glowing" impression of a face, but thought nothing of it until a few days later when she was reading her emails. The screen went haywire, and she saw the late Nirvana singer's face and heard him yelling for help. He asked her to kiss him, which she did (he apparently liked it and complimented her), and the screen went blank. A few days later, he was back, screaming to be freed. She did a virus check, found nothing wrong, and called in a ghostbuster. Now her computer is kaput. *D.Telegraph, 16 Aug 2000.*



wired for weird

Dave Walsh explores the frontiers of electronic weirdness...

DIARY OF A CAT

Worth the download wait, this little beauty should tickle the fancy of fortean cat lovers everywhere – the concept that their cat is actually a secret operative, hell-bent on bringing about the downfall of its 'owner'.

www.hecklers.com/diary/

SURREALIST GAMES

A bizarre site of American surrealism – here featuring a game called Time Travelers' Potlatch, where players choose a gift to give to various historical, mythical, or fictional figures, thus creating an 'imaginary relationship that otherwise tends to be defined too superficially by an arbitrary and abstract subjectivity'. Uh... right.

www.surrealism-usa.org/pages/time.html

LIVE DEFORMED FROG CAM

Brought to you by the lovely people at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, this lovely site lets you look at... well, deformed frogs.

www.pca.state.mn.us/hot/frogs/frog-cam3.html

GUNS SAVE LIVES

It would be funny if it wasn't serious – hell, it is funny. And as the great Oratio said of it, "it makes sense if you don't use any logic". This site, believe it or not, claims that "firearms are beneficial".

<http://GunsSaveLives.com/>

RELIGION SELECTOR... AN EXPLORATION OF WORLD BELIEF SYSTEMS

www.speakout.com/ActivismTools/selectors/religion/

Choose your perfect religion – or let the computer choose it for you. Fill in a questionnaire, and you find out which religion most suits your belief system.

DISTURBING AUCTIONS

<http://disturbingauctions.com/>

Another frightener – a website to auction those weird objects left to you by an insane aunt – she seems to have uploaded images of her bull scrotum handbag... also, postcards of goats nursing babies, and a sculpture of a decaying UPS driver, made from apple...

Dave (daev) Walsh lives in Dublin, Ireland, where he publishes *Blather*, the 'Journal of Gonzo Metaphysics' (www.blather.net). daev@blather.net

Extra
ExtraHEADLINES FROM
NEWSPAPERS
AROUND THE WORLDINVISIBLE TENANTS GET
COUNCIL CASH

Wimbledon Independent, 17 Feb 2000.

DRAGONS HELP FUND
CURE FOR DIABETES

North Bay (Ontario) Nugget, 4 Mar 2000.

BISHOP ATTACKS
CHILDLESS COUPLES

Huddersfield Daily Examiner, 8 Mar 2000.

LIZARD RE-ROUTES
QUEEN'S PLANE

D.Telegraph, 9 Mar 2000.

PELICANS MAY BE TURNED
INTO PUFFINS

The News (Portsmouth), 11 Mar 2000.

CHAOS AS CHURCH SPLIT
WIDENS

Nairobi Nation, 13 Mar 2000.

'FLYING RATS' HAVE BANK
IN FLAP

Irish News, 14 Mar 2000.

LOST SCISSORS FOUND IN
WOMAN

Guardian, 15 Mar 2000.

MANHUNT FOR FORMER
ELF BOSS

Irish Times, 15 Mar 2000.

IMPOTENT MUST SAY NO
TO
SAUSAGES AND BACON

Times, 15 Mar 2000.

BIRD BATH TAKES FLIGHT

Bridlington (Humberside) Free Press, 16 Mar 2000.

HOSPITAL PLANS HINGE
ON ROADS

Oxford Times, 17 Mar 2000.

POPE TO FLY IN HELLFIRE
HELICOPTER

D.Telegraph, 18 Mar 2000.

KING'S MISSING DUNG
SPARKS CRISIS

Weekly Telegraph, 22 Mar 2000.

TWINKIES SHORTAGE
LOOMS

New York Daily News, 22 Mar 2000.

BRING BACK THE BONGS,
SAY MPs

Metro, 23 Mar 2000.

PIRATES COULD BE JAILED

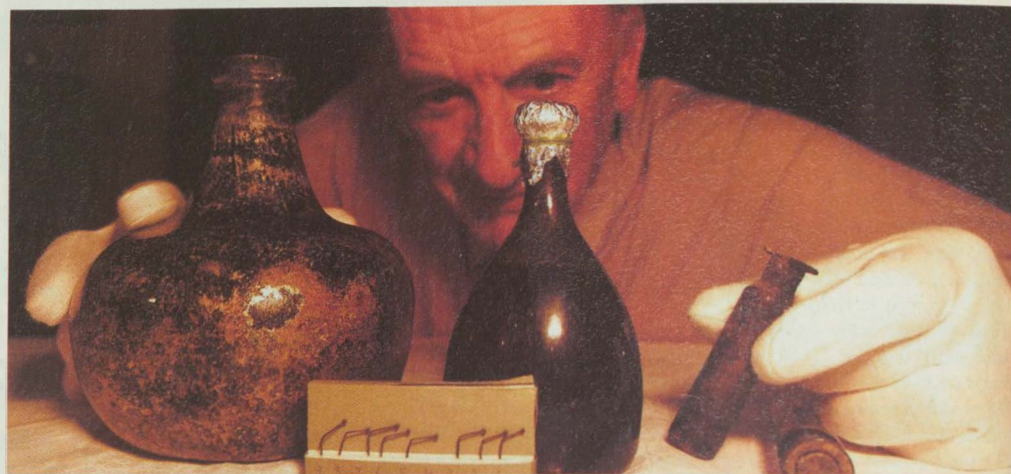
Halifax Evening Courier, 25 Mar 2000.

MAN OF GOD KICKS DOG
IN HEAD

Peterborough Eve. Telegraph, 29 Mar 2000.

Curses! Bottled again

Excavated bottle contained a disturbing selection of human samples... and some pins



LOT OF BOTTLE: Alan Massey with the witch bottle (left) which was buried nearly 300 years ago.

SEVEN YEARS AGO, A WITCH BOTTLE WAS FOUND with all its contents intact despite being buried more for than 270 years in the foundations of a long-demolished house near the ramparts of the castle in Reigate, Surrey. David Williams, the archaeologist who discovered it, assumed it contained wine and took it to a local vineyard, who arranged to test the contents. When the cork was pulled, there was a hiss of escaping gas. There was no trace of alcohol, so an early Georgian wine-tasting was off.

The contents were analysed by Alan Massey, 74, a retired organic chemist from Loughborough University, who published his findings (co-written by Tony Edmonds) last September in *Current Archaeology*. What he found was human urine, pubic hairs, an eyelash and eight bent brass pins. Bending the pins was a symbolic killing, as well as a way of torturing the witch. Such pins, ranging in number from half a dozen to several hundred, have been found in other witch bottles. The green glass bottle was made around 1685, and had "a long, hard life before burial", which took place in about 1720.

Witch bottles were made by people who believed their misfortune, or the death of family members or livestock, meant that they had been cursed. The bottles were intended to turn the curse back on the witch. Though the urine was that of the victim, it was believed there was such a strong link between curse and cursed that the charm would work on the witch for as long as the bottle remained sealed.

The use of witch bottles was recorded by Joseph Glanvill, Fellow of the Royal Society, in *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681). He recounts the events which ensued when Rev William Breaury, Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, took lodgings in a Suffolk village. His landlady had suffered ill health for some time, being haunted by "a thing in the shape of a bird". The phenomenon was reported to an old man "that travelled up and down the country" who recommended that the woman's husband should "take a bottle, and put his wife's urine in it, together with pins and needles and nails, and cork them up, and set the bottle to the fire, but be sure the cork be fast in it, that it not fly out. The man followed the prescription and set the bottle to the fire well corked..." But the cork and contents blew out of the bottle and the act had failed.

On a second attempt, "The man did accordingly,

and his wife began to mend sensibly, and in a competent time was finely well recovered. But there came a woman from a town some miles off to their house with a lamentable outcry, that they had killed her husband... at last they understood by her that her husband was a wizard and had bewitched this man's wife, and this counterpractise prescribed by the Old Man, which saved the man's wife from languishment, was the death of that wizard that had bewitched her..."

Brian Hoggard, a postgraduate student from Worcester University, is writing a thesis on witch bottles. "It was believed that they would cause such agony that the witch would come to your door and beg to be released from the curse," he said. More than 200 witch bottles have been unearthed; examples can be seen in the Victoria & Albert Museum, as well as museums in Cambridge, St Ives, Wisbech and Ipswich. Since almost all were broken or empty, those with their contents intact are of great interest. One sealed bottle was found in Deptford in 1897 and another in Westminster in 1904. Though most common in East Anglia, the earliest witch bottles date from the late 16th century in Nottinghamshire and the most recent from a mid-19th century cottage in Pershore, Worcestershire.

One 17th century witch bottle found in Pottery Street, Ipswich, contained a piece of felt, originally heart-shaped, into which several brass pins had been stuck; a piece of light brown human hair; more than 40 iron nails; over 40 fragments of glass; a two-pronged table fork; 24 glass studs and the remains of several wooden spills. The neck had been sealed with clay, and the bottle contained urine.

The most common type of witch bottle is the Greybeard or Bellamine, a round-bellied stoneware container, salt-glazed with a rich brown or grey finish, and imprinted with a bearded face on the neck, and either a coat-of-arms or an eight-armed solar symbol. First produced on the German Rhineland in about 1500, they became known as Bellamines after 1634 because they carried the alleged likeness of Cardinal Bellamine (1542-1621), Catholic inquisitor in the Low Countries. *Guardian*, 11 Sept; *Times*, 28 Sept 2000; "Skulls, Cats and Witch Bottles" by Nigel Pennick (1986). Brian Hoggard's website: www.folkmagic.co.uk Current *Archaeology Magazine*: www.archaeology.co.uk

Strange Deaths



A COMPENDIUM OF MACABRE DEPARTURES FROM THIS EARTH

CANDACE NEWMARKER, 10, died of suffocation during "rebirthing" therapy by the Connell Watkins counselling service in Evergreen, Colorado, on 18 April. Her adoptive mother, Jeane Newmaker of North Carolina, had paid \$7,000 to cure her of "reactive attachment disorder" and "deep rooted anger and pain". She was completely wrapped in a blanket, and large pillows were placed around her in a ceremony supposed to repair damaged bonds between children and their parents.

The procedure was captured on closed-circuit television. Therapists pressed on the pillows to simulate a woman's contractions during childbirth and to motivate the child to force her way out through one end of the blanket.

Ignoring the girl's screams and her repeated pleas that she couldn't breathe, they told her: "You've got to push hard if you want to be born - or do you want to stay in there and die?" There was a 20-minute lapse between the sound of Candace's last breath and her being unwrapped. She was in a coma and died the next day. Four therapists were charged with "child abuse resulting in death". [AP] 16 May; *Philadelphia Daily News*, 19 May; *D.Telegraph*, *Guardian*, 20 May 2000.

BRYAN SMITH, 43, THE DRIVER whose van nearly killed the horror writer Stephen King in June 1999, was found dead with

no sign of injury in his mobile home in Freyeburg, Maine, on 22 September, King's 53rd birthday. He had become increasingly isolated after the accident near North Lovell, Maine, in which King suffered mul-

RELAX WITH
THE GRIM REAPER

tiple injuries and nearly lost a leg. The sheriff's deputy who discovered the dead man was the officer who had been first on the scene of the road accident. Both Smith and King had Edwin as a middle name. The author of *Carrie* and *The Shining* bought Smith's van for \$1,500 and had it crushed in a wrecker's yard. He had pushed for Smith to be charged with assault and mocked him in a *New Yorker*

article as "a character out of one of my novels." Smith received a suspended sentence and lost his driving licence. An autopsy failed to find the cause of death. Toxicology tests could take several months. [AP] *Mirror*, 26 Sept; *D.Telegraph*, *Int. Herald Tribune*, 27 Sept; *Sunday Mail (Queensland)*, 15 Oct 2000.

A CAMEL HERDER AT JIZAN in southern Saudi Arabia paid with his life for beating one of his beasts, the *Al-Iqtissadiya* newspaper reported. The camel waited all day after the morning beating before trampling the sleeping herder to death and biting his neck. The blood-stained camel was shot dead after the herd's owner found the body. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 27 Sept 2000.

LESLEY HOVELLS, 39, of Llanelli, Caermarthenshire, known as Red Sonia because of her flaming red hair, had 118 body piercings - 28 ear studs, 13 earrings, 11 belly bars through her navel, 18 other bars, six lip rings, six nose studs, and 36 body rings. She is believed to have had over 40 piercings in the year before her death. She eventually died of septicæmia and bacteria in the bloodstream when her body was "overwhelmed" by infection. She went to her local pub with friends to celebrate the Millennium Eve and collapsed at 1.30am. She died in hospital 11 days later. *Times*, *D.Telegraph*, 29 Sept 2000.

Mythconceptions 30

THE FLAT EARTH

BY MAT COWARD

THE MYTH

In the Middle Ages, people believed the Earth was discoid; later Columbus, fount of all enlightenment, proved them wrong. This idiocy was a consequence of the cultural darkness which enveloped the world between the fall of the Roman Empire and the coming of the new European empires.



THE "TRUTH"

No-one doubts that our planet's sphericity was generally accepted by the 4th century BC; the question is, was this understanding lost as superstition conquered science in later days? There seems no reason to think so. 'Round Earth' maps survive from the later mediæval period, and recent researchers have failed to uncover any significant pre-Columbian European writers who took the pro-disc position; nor is there any evidence that the uneducated masses believed in a flat Earth. This myth was probably born in the second half of the 19th century, perhaps as part of a general Victorian reverence for the classical world and an accompanying contempt for all that came after.

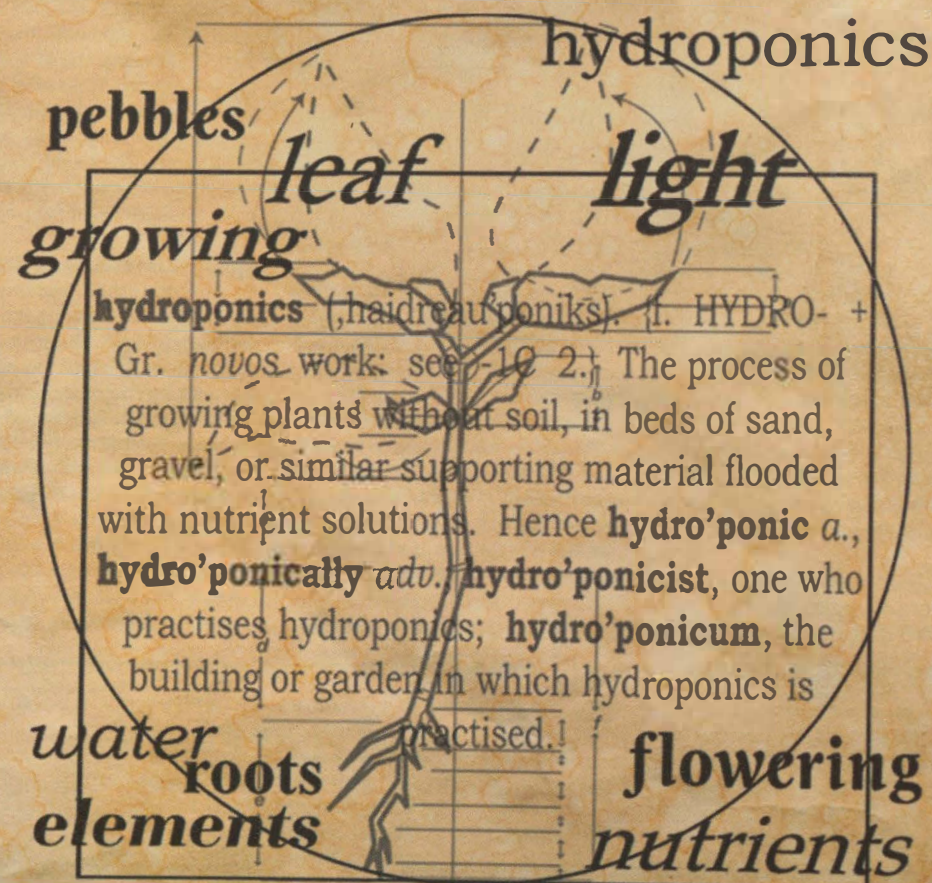
DISCLAIMER So, were our early ancestors as daft as our recent ancestors claimed? *FT* doesn't pretend to know for sure - nor do we much care whether the Earth is flat or not, as long as our drinks don't get spilt in orbit - but if you can add to the debate concerning Flat Earth belief, we'd love to hear from you.

MYTHCHASER John Dillinger's enormous pickled penis allegedly resides in an American museum. This story keeps coming up - is it cobblers, or what?

Encyclopædia Britannica online at www.britannica.com, and a review (author and source unknown) of an essay, 'The late birth of the Flat Earth,' by Stephen Jay Gould in a book called 'Dinosaur in a Haystack'.



greenfinger HYDROPONICS



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INTRODUCING THIS MONTH'S FEATURES

DEMONS OF OZ EVIDENCE OF RITUAL ABUSE IN AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S HOMES



At the height of the hysteria about Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA), *Fortean Times* drew attention to the plight of the unjustly accused, the trail of destroyed families left by over-zealous care workers, and the dangers of manufacturing memories under hypnosis. 'Survivors' asked us to accept their claims about vast, secret networks of cultists who kidnapped women and children, who bred babies for sacrifice

and cannibalistic feasts, and who summoned Satan in fearful rituals. In most cases, diligent police work found no forensic evidence of ritual sacrifice, imprisonment or other wild claims; and the La Fontaine Report found no evidence that groups were using Satanic worship or rituals for the criminal abuse of children. This is why we concluded there was no evidence of SRA. We never denied the terrible reality of physical and sexual child abuse in society, nor the possibility that some paedophiles might use the threat of Satan or the supernatural to terrorise children into submission and silence. However, in our view, these are not quite the same as the panic-belief in elaborate sacrificial cults that we were asked to believe existed in suburbia. Here, Richard Seary gives a different interpretation of the word 'ritual' based

on the Forde Report into child abuse in Australian children's institutions. Dozens of witnesses testified to nuns and priests misusing their authority to physically and sexually abuse the children in their care. Having survived an early childhood in these grim 'homes', Richard speaks from experience.



Richard Seary is an epigrapher and theologian who lives in Queensland, Australia and specialises in biblical languages. In late 1979, he was instrumental in helping *FT* switch to a more professional format (ie, with *FT30*) and has contributed occasional articles since then. He now edits *Open Season*, a newsletter fighting for the rights of former State wards and ex-residents of children's institu-

SPIRITS IN THE SKIES PHANTOM PLANES TAKE TO THE AIR



At the heart of popular ghostlore is a fatal contradiction. Folk seem ready to believe that ghosts are souls of dead people; but

how, then, do we account for the clothing of the phantoms or apparitions of inanimate objects such as chains, coaches, buildings... or aircraft. Nevertheless, says Roy Bainton, phantom planes form a thriving new genre of ghostlore, especially in the north of England.



Always on the look-out for the forgotten corners of history, regular *FT* contributor Roy Bainton claims he often gets sidetracked by the more

bizarre footnotes he comes across in his research. "Just when I think I'm wasting hours of my time in libraries or surfing the net, suddenly, an inexplicable oddity comes up and I just have to get to the roots of a story. What I discover when I get there is often much weirder than I expected." Roy has just returned from a trip to Russia to complete his forthcoming book, *Honoured By Strangers*, a biography of the WWI submariner, diplomat and spy, Captain Francis Cromie, who was murdered, mysteriously, by Bolsheviks in Petrograd in 1918.

ROCK GODDESS IN SEARCH OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST SIMULACRUM



Fortean Times has a soft spot for simulacra – images of faces and forms which occur spontaneously in Nature. While many of these 'meaningful' shapes are fairly generalised, some attract particular attention

because they are 'coincidental' (whatever that means) to that time or place. The ancients called these 'special' simulacra *acheropites* or (in Brewer's definition) "likenesses not made by the hands of men". The beauty of simulacra is that they can be seen by anyone. Besides embodying a bridge between Nature and the imagination, they are also, if they are ancient enough, imbued with the essence of folklore. Here historian Peter James tells of a little-known simulacrum in Turkey – a weeping woman turned to stone – which is still recognisable after nearly three millennia.

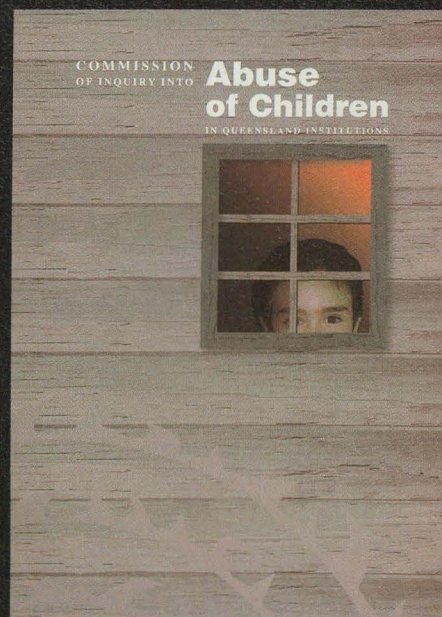


Peter James graduated in ancient history and archaeology from Birmingham University and UCL, and describes himself as a 'generalist' in the ancient history of the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean. Peter headed the team which wrote *Centuries of Darkness* (1991), which sparked controversy by revising the chronology of ancient Egypt and the Mediterranean. His *Sunken Kingdom* (1995) was described in *FT* as "a benchmark in Atlantean studies." With Nick Thorpe, he co-wrote *Ancient Inventions* (1994) and *Ancient Mysteries* (1999).

DEMONS

of Oz

The official inquiry into sexual and physical abuse in childrens' homes in Queensland, Australia, upheld the claims of hundreds of victims. Instead of the usual 'satanists' the Forde report blamed predatory priests and cruel nuns. **Richard Seary** examines their abuse of ritual and trust. Illustrations by **Jonathan Burton**.



THE FORDE INQUIRY STUNNED EVERYONE

To most forteans, revelations of ritual child abuse – sexual or otherwise – are the product of 'social anxiety attacks' which have their origins, largely, in anti-Catholic, fundamentalist propaganda. To the Protestant fundamentalist, any abuse of children by Catholics, especially by clergy, is 'Satanic' – "The Pope's a devil, don't ya know!" Such social hysteria, whipped up by those with a pre-set agenda, can rightly be dismissed and consigned to that marvellous dustbin called contemporary folklore. Britain and the USA had large outbreaks of such 'social anxiety' in the 1980s in which "the catastrophic notion of 'Satanic child abuse' that obsessed some fundamentalist groups and social workers in Britain... led to the break-up of many families." (Michell & Rickard, *Unexplained Phenomena*, 2000)

The British government was so concerned about the hysteria and the 'witch-hunts' conducted by childcare workers that it appointed Professor Jean La Fontaine to head an inquiry to report back to the Department of Health. La Fontaine's report found no substance to the allegations, much to the distress and anger of those firmly convinced that there was devilry afoot. It seems we can dismiss these allegations as products of the overactive religiosity of sectarians.

I really wish it were so simple. Over the years, complaints and rumours had circulated about the abuse of so-called 'captive' children in Australian homes. In order to dispel these, the Queensland government set up a 'Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions'. The Queensland government was expecting a report along the lines of the La Fontaine report, but a very different kind of picture has emerged.

The Commission – including Dr Jane Thomason and Hans Heilpern and headed by Leneen Forde AC, an eminent lawyer and former Governor of Queensland – was officially commissioned on 13 August 1998 and reported back in May 1999, though the Report was not made public until a few months later.

What has now become known as the Forde Inquiry stunned everyone – even this writer who gave evidence to the Inquiry and had some input into its final report. The Forde Report stated clearly that ritual and systematic abuse of children had occurred in Queensland Children's Institutions and was still occurring. It took evidence from 51 institutions, most of which were owned and operated by various churches under license from the State. In practically every one of these institutions, the Inquiry found that there had been abuse and that the child victims –



most of whom were now adults – should be compensated. The churches and government ran for cover. We – the former State wards and ex-residents – are still fighting both the churches and the state for that compensation.

Some of the institutions were very weird indeed. St Joseph's Orphanage, otherwise known as Neerkol, located near Rockhampton on Queensland's central coast, was founded in 1885 and run by the inappropriately-named Sisters of Mercy. What went on at Neerkol was first exposed in the mid-1990s by a journalist named Bruce Grundy. He sought out many ex-residents of the orphanage, and could hardly believe what they told him. They had lived at Neerkol at different times between the 1940s and the 1980s and many did not know each other, yet their stories were strikingly similar. They told of vicious floggings that left children barely conscious (administered by adult male employees), sexual abuse (including the rape of boys and girls as young as six years old), starvation used as punishment, and a number of strange rituals that the children were put through each day.

Other children were tied to posts by collars around their necks and some were kept in dark cells beneath the orphanage buildings. Witnesses told both Grundy and the Inquiry that this was where the nuns kept those children who they believed were "the Devil's children", and some, they added, had been incarcerated for years in these lightless pits. In reality, this term applied to any child who objected to their treatment.

Visitors rarely came to Neerkol, and when inspectors arrived from the State Children's Department, the nuns had a protocol which kept them away from the children. The inspectors simply accepted the nuns' word that the children

LEFT-HANDED CHILDREN WERE EXORCISED

were being treated lawfully; the Inquiry accused them of dereliction in their duty. It wasn't that the State was unaware of the complaints about Neerkol – many child 'survivors' told their horror stories to department officers once they had grown up and left; it was the fact that the State had turned a blind eye.

Sadly, many did not survive the Neerkol regime. Since the Forde Inquiry, police have been searching the orphanage's extensive grounds for burial sites. Witnesses told the Inquiry that they would find the remains of babies, as these were ceremonially cremated. Several recalled these strange rituals in which they had been made to take part.

Some older boys were ordered to make a bonfire and when this was ready a procession of nuns and children made its way from the orphanage. The leading nun would carry a small, white box wrapped in a white cloth. The procession would circle the unlit fire a few times

and then begin 'sung prayers' (presumably in Latin), the children having been told to keep silent. The box would be placed on the fire and more wood put on to cover it. Then one of the nuns would light a candle and say more prayers before putting the candle to the pile.

The nuns and children circled the bonfire until it was nearly consumed. Most children were ignorant of the true purpose of the ritual, but one boy remains disturbed by what he found out. During stormy weather, the usual ritual was abandoned as the nuns and children left the bonfire early for the shelter of the orphanage. A couple of the bigger boys continued to tend the fire and noticed the white box had not fully burned. Prodding it, they were terrified when a small arm fell from the box. Later, when they told the story as men, they said they were too frightened to mention it to anyone.

As cremation was forbidden to Catholics as a means of disposing of the dead, what were these nuns doing? Other bizarre and equally unorthodox rituals at Neerkol took place. For example, left-handed children were exorcised for being "in league with the Devil". Their left-handedness was proof enough! A similar fate befell any child who stuttered. One girl who stuttered remembers being tied to a pole; other children were encouraged to throw sticks at her and this recurred many times over the years. In the 1990s, this girl – now a woman – and 70 other 'survivors' received a substantial financial settlement from the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton, as compensation for what they had suffered at Neerkol. Other cases are pending.

Do these cases count as 'Satanic ritual abuse'? Fundamentalist Protestants would probably say "yes", but, in Queensland, at least, their own institutions were just as brutal and strange, though in different ways. The Report touches lightly on one possible explanation for the bizarre behaviour of the Neerkol nuns. The Sisters of Mercy – who also ran St Vincent's Orphanage at Nudgee, near Brisbane – were all Irish and came from the same convent in Ireland. They were little more than ignorant peasants. The uneducated, eldest daughters of poor Irish farmers, they were deeply superstitious and inculcated with more than a touch of the 'Old' (ie, pre-Christian) Irish faith. They had been sent out to these remote institutions in Australia when they were as young as 12 or 13, and were expected to care for hundreds of babies and children. It was a disaster waiting to happen.

To these uneducated girls, the priests seemed like gods who could do anything they wished. Some of the priests who visited the orphanages were appointed as chaplains; others were paedophiles who preyed on the children. And the Inquiry recorded evidence that the leaders of the Catholic Church in Queensland were aware of what was going on.

Damning evidence came from an Italian nun (named in the Report as 'Sister G'), who was visiting the Nudgee orphanage as Acting Superior in the early 1960s. One day she found a boy, 'M', in the washrooms, trying to wash away blood from his injured anus. She learned that he received this injury after being tied to a bed and raped by a priest, Father Errol Stanaway. The Irish nuns usually ignored the activities of the priests, but not Sister G. She took it up with the Archdiocese (the office of the Bishop of Queensland). When she complained of Father Stanaway's sexual abuse of children at Nudgee, the reply from Monsigneur Moloney stunned her; he said: "We knew that about Father Stanaway when we sent him down there." M's

own testimony to the Inquiry tells of 14 instances of enforced sexual abuse "with no tenderness" over two and a half years. At least three other children were known to have suffered his assaults. (Report, pp87–88.)

The Inquiry established that ritual sexual abuse of children occurred in several other State, Catholic and Protestant children's institutions in Queensland. It is no secret that Queensland is the most backward of all Australia's states and territories; it is often referred to by southerners as the 'Deep North' in a parody of American prejudice. Socially, morally and legally, Queensland is a 'hillbilly' state, where corruption is the norm and children are not valued. As indication of this disgrace, in this last year (2000) the state spent less than half the average of other states on the protection and care of children. Conversely, the state is known for its religiosity; a higher percentage of its population, compared with other states, attend church regularly. What has this to do with abuse of children in care? Everything!

In 'Bible Belt' Queensland, there has always been great store placed in the display of 'public morality'. The children placed in orphanages were abandoned or were seized – often by church or state 'welfare' officials – from single-parent families or from Aboriginal families. The children of the latter are sometimes referred to as 'the Stolen Generation'. The archaic belief that the perceived 'immorality' of their parents was inherent in the children prevailed, and the children really were branded with the sins of their parents. In the fordean context, the entire child welfare system was suffering a collective anxiety attack.

The catalogue of abuses was not limited to Catholic-run homes, but included both Protestant and State institutions; according to the Report, the worst was Westbrook, a state-run reformatory school for boys. "Westbrook stood at the apex of the 'correctional' system for boys in care and was without doubt its most feared institution," said the Report (p124). No civilised society should have allowed such a 'home' for children to exist. Violent ritualised abuse was an integral part of the Westbrook regime.

Westbrook was a working farm and although it produced good harvests using child labour, the boys were kept on a very poor diet. The slightest infringement of its many and arbitrary rules led to savage public floggings and ritual humiliation. One witness described "a [naked] boy being strapped with a belt at least 40 times by [the Superintendent and another officer] for stealing a carrot while working in the orchard... After the beating he was made to kiss the officer's boots. Before he dressed, he was ordered to repeat... 'Thank you, Sir, for showing me the evil of my ways.'" (Report, p128)

Boys were often flogged until they were unconscious, their bodies covered in blood. There was little difference – except for the gas chambers and crematoria – between Westbrook and the Nazi concentration camps, yet institutions like this were functioning as recently as 1994, when Westbrook was finally closed. It was nothing less than state-sanctioned terrorism against children. Most of the child victims, now adults, are still fighting for recognition and compensation, but have met with stony silence from the State Governor. The current Government is headed by Labor Premier Peter Beattie, who gave his 'mate', Sir Richard Branson, millions of dol-

lars to set up Virgin Airlines in Australia but not one cent to the child victims of its evil neglect.

Many of the institutions covered by the Inquiry were found to have been run by people who were mad, bad or indifferent to the sufferings of their charges. When the Report names such well-known churches as the Salvation Army, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Catholic Church, it shakes the very foundation of public trust and confidence. Even though the Forde Inquiry was a properly constituted 'Royal' Commission – with lawyers, investigating officers, and powers to compel witnesses – the

HE WAS MADE TO KISS THE OFFICER'S BOOTS

public in general and the churches in particular have had some difficulty in accepting the levels of abuse it revealed.

Fortean take note of patterns in human behaviour, perhaps the most difficult being the criminal abuse of children. Over the years, there have been many horror stories of similar children's institutions, told by 'survivors'; generally, they were not believed. Writing in June 1996, Bob Rickard explained why: "All these tales told by 'survivors' are short on verifiable fact. You are asked to believe them or not... and that is the underlying technique, if not the hallmark, of all 'survivor' stories." (FT87:40)

Sadly, in the case of the ritual abuse of children in Queensland institutions, this is no longer the case. We now have "verifiable fact" and the uncovering of what American psychologist and social scientist Howard Bloom calls "killer cultures." The evidence seems to show that children placed in enclosed institutions operated by the 'religious' are at far greater risk of abuse than those in the general population. Why? Because the 'religious' believed that "Young humans, cursed by the original sin of Adam, still carried the Devil within them, His Satanic Majesty could only be chased away with a good thrashing. 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' was a deadly serious maxim." (Bloom, p242) **F**

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING

KEY BOOK ON THIS SUBJECT

The Lucifer Principle (1995)
Howard Bloom

Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, (Queensland Government Publications, May 1999. ISBN 0-646-37484-2).
Leneen Forde

RECOMMENDED SURFING

KEY WEBSITES ON THIS SUBJECT

www.qld.gov.au/html/fordeinquiry/inquiryreport.html
Forde Report online

<http://apology.west.net.au/>
Links on the 'Stolen Generation' of
Aborigine children.



SPIRITS

in the sky

In the Derbyshire Peak district so many WW2 aircraft have been sighted under mysterious circumstances that locals could be forgiven for thinking the war is still going on above their heads. From phantom planes to ghostly pilots and the weird airborne experiences of flyers, **Roy Bainton** thinks there is clearly something unearthly in the skies. Illustration by **Alexander Tomlinson**.

The great aviation writer, Squadron Leader David Beatty, DFC and Bar, once wrote: "Time – it is in the air that lie hidden the clues to Time... Within Time lie such mysteries as fate, clairvoyance, pre-cognition, luck, time warps, apparitions..."¹

There's something about flyers which distinguishes them from sailors and drivers. The sea is dangerous, but it gives you a chance. More people die on the UK's roads each year than in all the world's air casualties combined – but at least in a car you can pull over for a nap if things get hairy. Above the clouds, you just hang there on a combination of good luck and advanced engineering. We don't belong in the sky; it's not a human environment. In fact, it's a pretty weird place to be, full stop.

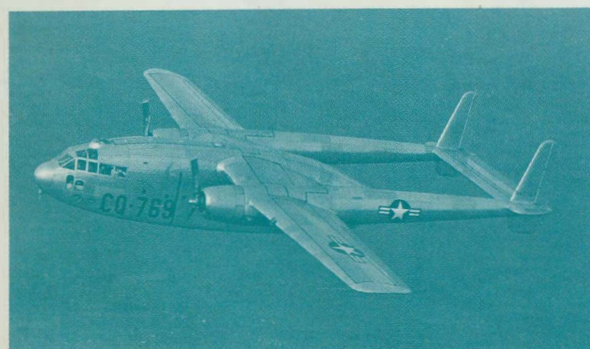
On 9 July, 1945, the big Lockheed Constellation airliner AHM-4 was about to take off from Chicago when a mechanic walked into one of her propellers and was killed. One year to the day later, on 9 July 1946, Captain Arthur Lewis died at AHM-4's controls over the Atlantic Ocean. The next year (and on the same day again), the new captain, Robert Norman, struggled with a serious engine fire and jammed controls, narrowly missing a collision with a large apartment building.² As 9 July 1948 passed without a disaster, passengers and crew sighed with relief. By 9 July 1949, complacency had set in. Sure enough, that day the happy passengers nibbled their nuts and quaffed their cocktails with no disturbance. But on the following day, 10 July, AHM-4 crashed outside Chicago, killing Captain Robert Norman and everyone on board.

Even coincidence likes to play a trick now and again.

The sad fate of AHM-4 can probably be filed under rational explanation. But UFOs aside, up there in the pale blue yonder, beyond the realm of coincidence, there's a catalogue of airborne mysteries which would have Biggles himself baffled.

The Moors to the west of Sheffield are as bleak as they are beautiful. The peaceful River Derwent and the Derwent reservoir act as a picturesque border between the rugged high Peaks of Derbyshire to the west and the windswept wilds of South Yorkshire to the east. This is walking country. One quiet April evening in 1995, retired Sheffield postman Tony Ingle and his dog set off from his holiday caravan in the Peaks village of Hope on their daily walk along Aston Lane, which roughly follows the route of the railway line to Edale.

Mr Ingle is a reluctant witness, extremely wary of journalists, yet genuinely shaken by his experience that day. When I spoke to him, he'd become weary of persistent hacks (this one included) and was feeling pretty miffed after his unpaid treatment by a German TV crew. But, with a bit of pleading and cajoling, he



**WE DON'T BELONG
IN THE SKY – IT'S
NOT A HUMAN
ENVIRONMENT**



IMAGE BY ALEXANDER TOMLINSON. RETOUCHES BY TINA STOLLAR. MODELS SUPPLIED BY AIRBRACERY.COM

told me his story.

"As I got along the lane near the railway bridge I looked up. Coming straight towards me, about 40-50ft (12-15m) above the ground, was what I can only describe as a World War II war plane. I looked around and saw that my dog had bolted - he was scurrying off back along the lane. What struck me was the sudden change in the atmosphere... it was as if I'd walked into a morgue. I have no time for the paranormal or the occult and I don't believe any of this UFO stuff, but something was very odd about that day. As the plane drew close, I looked up and the propellers were turning, but the plane was making no sound at all. It suddenly veered and banked over to one side, disappearing over the brow of the hill in a steep dive. I waited for a crash or an explosion, but nothing came. When I reached the brow of the hill there was nothing in the valley below but grazing sheep..." Tony Ingle's dog still refuses to go into Aston Lane.

On 24 March 1997, the phantom, which has been identified as a USAF Dakota transport plane, returned, this time to the skies above the village of Bolsterstone, some 10 miles (16km) north of Tony Ingle's sighting. A lot of people were out that night, avoiding the light pollution of nearby Sheffield to get a clearer moorland view of the passing of the Hale-Bopp comet. They got a bit more than they bargained for.³

COULD WE BE SEEING AN IMPRINT OF THE PAST?

Between 9pm and 10 pm that day, the police and emergency services received a flood of 999 calls reporting a low-flying plane which appeared to be in serious trouble. Just after 10pm, reports were received of a flash and explosion, followed by a column of smoke in the vicinity of the Derwent Reservoir. Marie-France Tattersfield, an ex-Special Constable, was with her husband, an ex-pilot, that night. They had seen a plane, displaying wing-tip lights, flying low over Midhope Moors. Seconds later, it hit the ground. Gamekeeper Michael Ellison and his wife, from the village of Strines, reported hearing a huge explosion. Over 100 police, seven mountain rescue teams and tracker dogs were called out. Two helicopters flew back and forth looking for the wreck. But 24 hours later, after an area of 50 square miles (130 sq km) had been combed, the search was brought to a halt. There had been no reports of any planes in trouble from any of the Aviation Authorities. The

doomed Dakota had vanished yet again.

Over 300 airborne souls have lost their lives over the Peak District. When it comes to mythology and phenomena, the area makes Roswell look about as mysterious as Frank Dobson's beard. 'Spirit' aircraft have a long, peculiar history.

Strange airplanes were reported up to six years before the Wright Brothers had their first great success at Kitty Hawk in 1903. Most of these were during the great 'airship flap' (the first modern 'UFO wave'), between November 1896 and May 1897. At that time, throughout Texas, from Galveston to Deadwood, odd reports abounded of men landing in strange craft, having 'great wings and fans', usually asking for water.⁴ Two of these pre-aviation mystery 'pilots' actually gave their names as Wilson and Jackson, claiming that they were from 'an interior town in Illinois'. Whoever they were, one wonders why they and their planes vanished from the scene after May 1897.

Within the three decades following the birth of flight, the 'ghost' plane was firmly established, mainly in the cold, barren wastes of Scandinavia. Hundreds of reports of 'ghost planes' were filed between 1932 and 1938 throughout Norway, Sweden and Finland. They were usually of grey, unmarked craft, much more powerful than any known airplanes of the time.⁵ Like Tony Ingle's Dakota, they often flew in complete silence.

In a time when airplane design was still very basic, reports of large, multi-engined 'airliners'

PHANTOM FUROR

Recently declassified intelligence documents have revealed the remarkable story of a genuine phantom aircraft, the German Heinkel 113.

In 1935, Goering ordered the Heinkel works to manufacture some prototype He.112 fighters for the Luftwaffe. In 1936, however, the 112 was ditched in favour of the Messerschmidt 109, which was less costly to produce and had better handling characteristics. So Heinkel sold the 112 models to Spain and Japan, where they failed to be of much use. Twelve models of the new, improved version of the 112, called the Heinkel 100 to give it the appearance of an entirely new aircraft, rolled off the production line in 1938. It had fewer component parts and a more powerful engine. Some of these were sold to German allies, others were retained to guard the Heinkel works, near Rostock, once war broke out in 1939.

Later in 1939, Nazi intelligence had the brainwave of having the He. 112 planes at Rostock repainted with non-existent squadron markings, renamed the 113 and photographed with Heinkel workers posed as pilots.

The pictures soon found their way into the world's newspapers, labelled as having been



PAINT JOB: The elusive 'Heinkel 113' was in fact the defunct He. 100 (above) photographed complete with new markings and fake pilots.

taken on Danish airfields, alongside reports of the planes' formidable fighting prowess.

By May 1940, Britain's respected journal, *The Aeroplane*, was featuring the 'He. 113', while the Air Ministry included it in its official recognition handbook for pilots. A ministry briefing document reported that there was at least one He.113 squadron in active service. In his Battle of Britain dispatch, Air-Marshal Hugh Dowding, head of Fighter Command, wrote that the He.113 "made its appearance in limited numbers... its main attributes were high performance and ceiling..." During the Battle of Britain, British pilots regularly

reported encounters with the 113, although doubts about the photographs were raised by future Air Marshal Robert Soudby, who wondered where the planes would hold guns and ammunition.

The deception continued, however. In May 1940, a Hurricane in 213 Squadron claimed to have shot a 113 down over Dunkirk, while in September that year, Pilot Officer Boot reported engaging one in a dogfight.

Near Dover that same month, another pilot reported leaving a 113 diving in flames. Lieutenant Peck, a B-17 'Flying Fortress' pilot, encountered one off the French

coast, describing it as a "very pretty plane" in his journal.

As the sightings continued, Air Intelligence began to smell a flying rat.

As early as June 1940, an unnamed source at the Rostock factory had revealed that the 113s were simply repainted He.100s.

But it was not until January 1941, in the build up to the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia, that the British air attaché in Belgrade sent this coded message to his superiors:

"According to certain confidential information, this aircraft presumably does not exist; ie, the Germans have advertised it in order to give the enemy the impression that they possess such a powerful fighter..."

Despite this evidence, and the fact that no crashed 113 was ever found, there was no official announcement from Allied Intelligence stating that the 113 didn't exist. This was a true phantom of the skies. *Guardian*, 22 Oct 2000

Heinkel He 100 archive: <http://www.stud.uni-hannover.de/user/67700/he100.htm>



LAST OF THE FEW: Britain's skies seem to host a perpetual replay of World War Two, with Wellingtons (above) over Wales and Dakotas in the Peak District.

shining brilliant spotlights onto towns, trains and ships below created genuine puzzlement. Some planes were even reported to vanish into thin air as witnesses watched. Whilst we're on the historical angle, it's worth mentioning that the baffling 'flying triangles' which currently exercise the minds of modern ufologists also have a long history. In his *Book of The Damned*, written when flight was still in its infancy, Charles Fort offers a few pre-Wilbur & Orville sightings in chapter 20 which certainly sit well alongside what we know today about the Stealth bomber.

The mysterious plane reports continued around the world. In the mid 1960s in the USA, hundreds of strange sightings of 'Flying Boxcars' (the huge C-119 cargo plane) were filed. The Air Force often denied the presence of these planes, and witnesses from West Virginia and Ohio frequently reported that the aircraft, well away from recognised flight paths, seemed to 'fly low, as if about to crash'. Again, they were unmarked, grey with several engines.⁶

From the moors of Yorkshire to the hills of West Virginia, what are people seeing? Are the stricken warplanes sighted over Britain real ghosts?

The UK is littered with World War II crash sites. A Canadian Dakota went down in the Peak District on 24 July 1945 with the loss of its seven-man crew. A B-17 Flying Fortress went down near Meltham, and another Dakota, captained by ex-WWII Lancaster pilot Frank Pinkerton, crashed at Winberry Stones, Dovestones, near Greenfield on 19 August 1941, claiming 21 lives. On 3 November 1948, USAF Captain Landon P Tanner and his crew perished aboard their B-29 reconnaissance plane. If anywhere deserves to

A PHANTOM SPITFIRE HAS FREQUENTLY BEEN SEEN

be haunted, then this is the place.

Ron Collier is an aviation historian who formed a local group to study these crashes. It is to be hoped that his methodology was more orthodox than that of the local coven, who got together with a ouija board to attempt to identify the crew of the 1948 Fortress. (A well-aimed enquiry to the USAF archives might have been less stressful). The glass moved in a predictable manner and brought them a message from the beyond. Guess what - the poor American flyers "are not at rest where they are..." Hardly surprising, if you came from Ohio or Kentucky and ended up in a bog west of Sheffield. In 1993, a privately owned Hawker Hunter piloted by Walter Cubitt hit the ground on Broomhead Moor during a storm. Local legend now has it that a farmer who collected some of the debris and stored it in his barn was forced to put the pieces of the plane back; according to his son, the spirit of poor Walter Cubitt (whose body is said to be several metres beneath the moor's boggy surface) was so disturbed that he witnessed the barn "almost shaking to pieces". 'Don't mess with a downed flyer' seems to be the message here.

But when it comes to aeronautical phantoms, the Peak District doesn't get all the limelight.

At Biggin Hill Airfield, just South of Croydon,

a phantom Spitfire has frequently been seen and heard in the vicinity of this famous wartime site.

And in Wales, in the Towy Valley between Llandovery and Llandeilo in Dyfed, where bomber crews trained during World War II, locals and visitors have reported a ghostly Wellington bomber, flying low over the valley. Are we seeing an imprint of the past?

What can explain the bizarre story of three-year-old Carl Edon, of Middlesbrough, who drew swastikas, telling his parents that "this was what I had on my uniform when I was flying". This could have been dismissed, but when the three-year-old drew the control panels and layout of a German bomber's cockpit to a high degree of accuracy, and told the story of how he had met his death in the Luftwaffe... Another example of the beyond-the-grave power of flyers or simply a very clever little lad?

And planes vanish. Or do they? On its approach to Santiago Airport, in Chile, in August 1947, a British Lancastrian airliner, *Star Dust*, sent a curious radio message. It was one word, repeated three times: "Stendec Stendec Stendec"⁷ Three minutes later, *Star Dust* was swept from the skies, not to be heard of again for 53 years. This year the UK press took great interest when Argentinian mountaineers found the wreckage on Mount Tapungato, near the Chilean border in Argentina, but the meaning of 'Stendec' remains a mystery. (A letter on this will appear in the next issue - Ed.)

A lot has been written about Romeo Foxtrot 398, supposedly the only intact example of the Avro Lincoln bomber built to succeed the famous Lancaster (the Second World War ended before it could be brought into service). Since being lovingly restored at the Cosford Aerospace Museum near Wolverhampton, Romeo Foxtrot 398 has been claimed to be one of the world's most haunted pieces of machinery. A figure has



GHOST IN THE MACHINE: The only surviving Avro Lincoln – Romeo Foxtrot 398 – is reputedly the world's most haunted aircraft. A mysterious figure has been seen in the cockpit, strange sounds have been heard and it has been investigated by a team of paranormal researchers.

reputedly been seen in the pilot's seat and handles in gun turrets turn on their own. Most famously, during the night of 20 June 1987, a team of paranormal researchers wired the plane for sound, recording what was believed to be very faint voices, the sounds of aircraft engines and hangar doors being opened and closed. Other recordings have been made, and the strange incidents continue. There have been claims and counter-claims about the tapes' authenticity, but it certainly endows the restored Lincoln with a bit of mysterious celebrity. Some believe that the phantoms of Romeo Foxtrot 398 emanate from the various wartime materials used to renovate the bomber. Or are the ghosts of long-gone air crews still on one everlasting mission?

Many flyers will tell you that there's often some strange precognitive process attached to aviation. In the 10 days before 26 May 1979, 23-year-old office manager David Booth, of Cincinnati, Ohio, had the same nightmare each time he went to sleep. He heard failing engines, then saw an American Airlines plane swerve, almost inverted, then roll and crash somewhere near the airport buildings. It exploded into mountainous orange flames – he actually felt the heat. Booth was so concerned that he rang American Airlines. "There was never any doubt," he said, "that something was going to happen. It wasn't like a dream – it was like watching television." The airline was sympathetic, but could do nothing. Sadly, David's dream came true. On Friday, 26 May, an American Airlines DC-10 crashed after take-off from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport almost exactly as he'd dreamed it. It was one of the worst disasters in US flying history with a death toll of 273 people.⁸

Time warps and flying have been favourites of sci-fi writers for decades. But some experiences hide fiction behind a cloud. Air Vice-Marshal Sir Victor Goddard was famous for his WWII work with the RAF in the Far East. He'd already had one lucky escape – he was captain of the ill-fated R101 airship which burned to a crisp 48 passengers on 5 October 1930, but was not on duty that day. He tells a strange story entitled *Breaking The Time Barrier*⁹ which amply demonstrates the thinking behind the David Beaty quote at the beginning of this article. In the early 1930s, he made a flight in an aircraft with no radio or cloud flying instruments and an open cockpit. As he flew into thick cloud, he suddenly went into an uncontrollable spin. Unable to see where he was and painfully aware of the mountainous Scottish terrain, he struggled with the joystick and suddenly emerged from the cloud just 200ft (60m) above the coastline of the Firth of Forth. He followed the Edinburgh road, planning to head for Drem airfield. Soon he saw the black hangars on the horizon. As he approached the aerodrome, he experienced everything the weather could throw at him – severe turbulence, black cloud and torrential rain. Again he lost height. Then suddenly, miraculously, he was in full sunshine, as if someone had simply turned on the light by flicking a switch.

He realised he was perilously close to the ground and had to pull up sharply in an attempt to fly over the hangar roofs. But as he approached the hangar, he noticed something curious. The biplanes parked on the runways were all painted bright yellow, and the mechanics, who were pushing another yellow plane out

through the hangar doors, were all wearing blue overalls. He'd only been at Drem the day before, and the planes then were aluminium-doped, certainly not yellow. And RAF mechanics' overalls were brown, not blue. He also found it curious that his dangerously low altitude as he approached the hangars ought to be causing some consternation amongst those on the ground (he could have been court-martialled for such dangerous flying), yet none of the blue-overalled men seemed to take any notice, not even looking up at what would have been a loud, approaching danger.

It was four years before Drem Airfield became a flying training school. And it was that year, 1939, when they decided to paint the 504N biplanes yellow. And 1939 was the year the RAF mechanics changed from brown to blue overalls. It seemed that Goddard had briefly flown into the future.

On 18 September 1961, the Chief of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, died when his DC-6 plane carrying 130 passengers crashed into the jungle in Northern Rhodesia. After his death, they found his personal notebook. The last thing he'd written was a poem, which opens with the lines

*Is it another country
In another world of reality?*

and closes with

*And I begin to know the map
And to get my bearings.¹⁰*

They say that travel broadens the mind. So, the next time you fly, make sure you get a window seat. There's weird stuff up there. **Fi**

ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM, COSFORD

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1 Beaty, David. *Strange Encounters*, Methuen, London, 1983.

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3 See *Yorkshire Post*, 26 March 1997. (The incident was covered by other media, and for a full overview see Sheffield Online at www.demon.co.uk/dayco/ghost.html)

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US Armed Services Committee Hearing on Unidentified Flying Objects, 5 April 1966.

7 *Great Mysteries*, Aldus Books, London, 1974.

8 *Mystics & Prophets*, Paragon Books, Bristol, 1997.

9 *Light: The Journal of the College of Psychic Studies*, Summer 1966

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RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING KEY BOOK ON THIS SUBJECT

Echoes in the Air: A Chronicle of Aeronautical Ghost Stories
Jack Currie (Crécy Publishing Ltd, 1996)

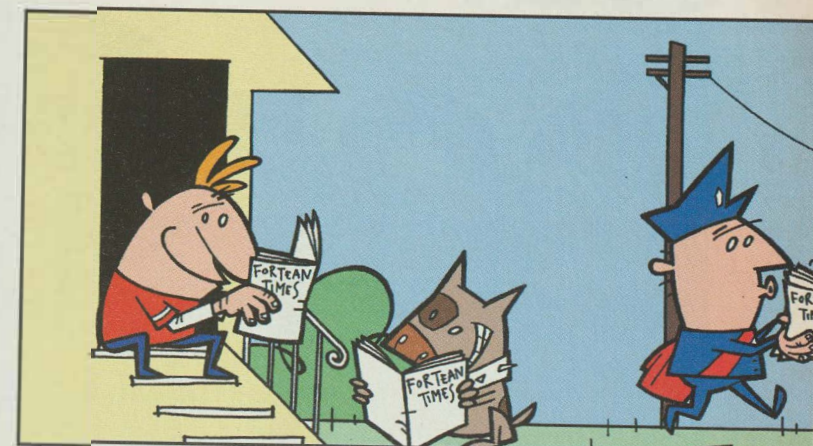
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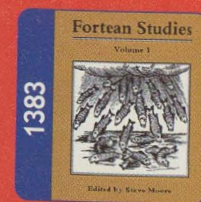


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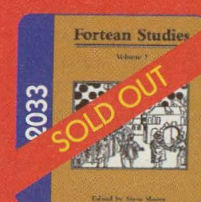
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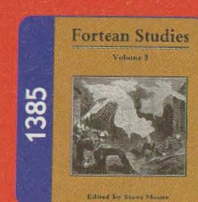
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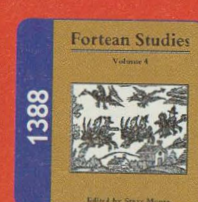
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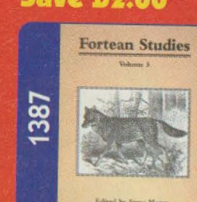
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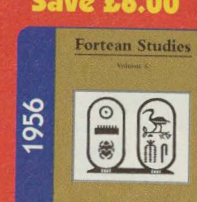
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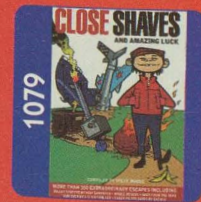
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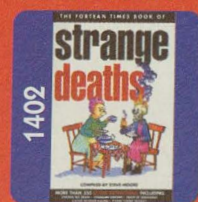
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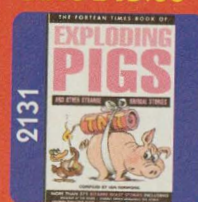
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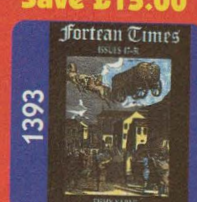
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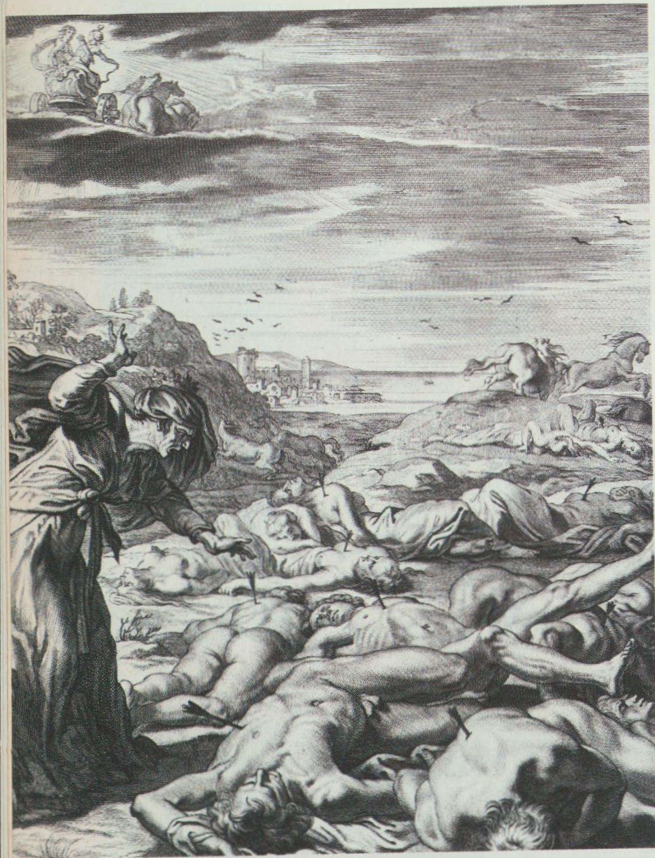
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GODDESS

Forget the pyramids – the world's most fortan ancient monument is not in Egypt, that land of overworked mysteries, but in Turkey. **Peter James** follows in the footsteps of classical historians and ancient Roman tourists and tracks down the world's oldest simulacrum. All photographs by **Peter James**



THE GRANDMOTHER OF FORTEAN PHENOMENA

Take a weeping Madonna, combine it with a simulacrum and dash of *trompe l'oeil*, then add a case of almost supernatural survival over some 3,000 years and a sidelight on the origins of the word *syphilis*, and there you have her – the 'statue' of Niobe. According to some Greek myths, Niobe was the first woman – a kind of Hellenic Eve – whose descendants populated Greece. She can also make a good claim to be the grandmother of fortan phenomena.

I first saw Niobe a few years ago when I was carrying out some archaeological reconnaissance work near the Aegean coast of Turkey. The main task was to try to locate the prehistoric monuments which the ancient Greek writer Pausanias located in the hinterland behind Izmir (ancient Smyrna). He was a medical doctor who, in about AD 150, wrote the world's earliest surviving guidebook.

In an incredibly detailed 10 volumes, Pausanias described, for the benefit of well-to-do Roman tourists, everything that was worth seeing in ancient Greece. No serious traveller to the Aegean can afford not to pack a copy of Pausanias. It was by using the clues he provided that, during the 1870s, the German adventurer Heinrich Schliemann discovered the prehistoric monuments of Mycenae on mainland Greece. Now, according to legend, the Mycenaean dynasty of Agamemnon was descended from Niobe's father Tantalus, who had once ruled over a fabulously rich kingdom based at Mount Sipylus in Asia Minor.

It was for the remains of the Tantalid dynasty, Niobe amongst them, that I was searching, with the help of my Greek archaeologist colleague Dr Nikos Kokkinos. Only an hour's drive away from Izmir, where people fly in to be bussed to their beach holidays, Mt Sipylus has been amazingly neglected by tourists and archaeologists alike. At Sipylus, Pausanias promised rich pickings, from the miraculous "weeping" statue of Niobe to traces of the lost city of Tantalus. We were not disappointed. Sipylus is a wonderland of archaeological curiosities.

Our journey to Sipylus was made all the more exciting by the fact that were on Pausanias' home ground. He was probably born in Magnesia, the Greek predecessor of the Turkish city of Manisa, which now flourishes near the mountain. Though his guidebook only really covers the Greek mainland, Pausanias gives us occasional titbits of information about the

NOW YOU SEE HER: From certain points the weeping Niobe is clearly visible (above); from others she reverts to an anonymous rock formation (below).

marvels to be seen 'back home'. Put together, these glimpses describe a cluster of features and monuments around Mount Sipylus, modern Manisa Dağı. Though some of these had already been clearly located near Manisa, misreading of one classical source had meant that others had been sought on the neighbouring mountain of Yamanlar, which lies just behind Izmir (Smyrna).

Having examined and eliminated the Yamanlar sites, we went to Sipylus, where everything fell into place just as Pausanias had described it. We climbed the mountain to reach a crag with a carved 'throne', where Tantalus' son Pelops sat to view his kingdom. Below is a massive gorge of haunting beauty, which must be the 'crack' in the mountain referred to by Pausanias; in a massive upheaval, he relates, the mountain opened up and water gushed out, flooding the city of Tantalus on the plain. On another cliff face is a magnificent Late Bronze Age carving of the Mother Goddess, locally known as 'Cybele'. (It dates to about the 14th–13th centuries BC.) According to Pausanias, this was the earliest representation of the Mother ever created, and it was carved by Tantalus' son Broteas.

Not far away is a unique rock-cut tomb, thought to be the last resting place of Tantalus. And there are two lakes: the lake of Tantalus on the mountain, where Pausanias says he saw white eagles; and the lake of Saloe (now dry), underneath which lie the remains of the lost city of Tantalus, or Tantalus. I have argued elsewhere in detail that the story of Tantalus, destroyed by an earthquake and covered by a flood, was actually the main source for Plato's Atlantis.¹ That's another story.

Returning to Pausanias, last but not

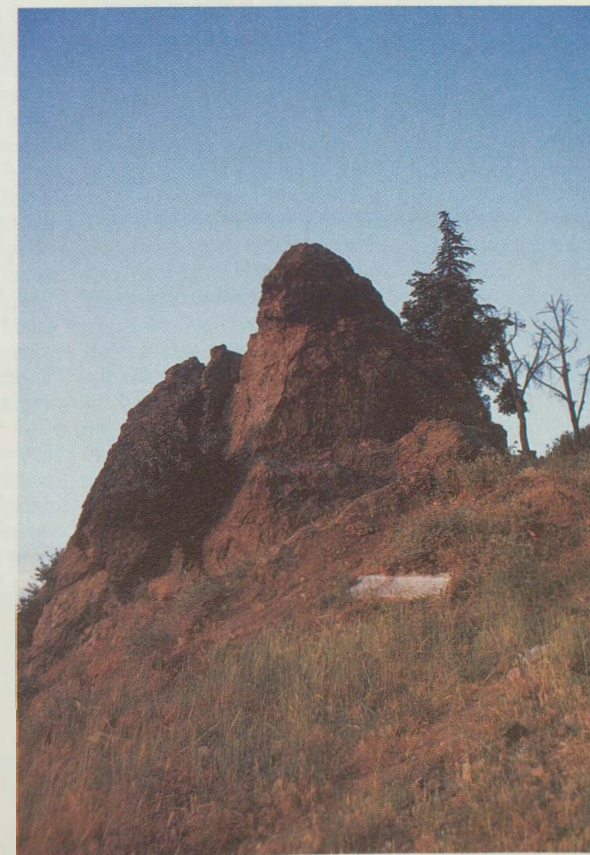
ZEUS TURNED HER TO STONE AS AN ACT OF MERCY

least of the marvels he described was Niobe herself. "I myself have seen Niobe when I was climbing up the mountains to Sipylus. Niobe from very close up is a rock and a stream, and nothing like a woman either grieving or otherwise; but if you go further off you seem to see a woman downcast and in tears."²

So what was this curious monument? I use the term monument loosely; Niobe is actually a natural rock, so convincingly sculpted by the elements into the shape of a mourning woman that ancient writers frequently referred to it as a statue. It is in fact the world's oldest recorded simulacrum, being referred to as early as Homer in the 8th century BC. In the *Iliad* (24:612ff) he says that Niobe "stands among the crags in the untrodden hills of Sipylus, where people say the Nymphs, when they have been dancing on the banks of Achelous, lay themselves down to sleep. There Niobe, in marble, broods on the desolation that the gods dealt out to her."

So how did Niobe come to this sorry pass? The tragedy of Niobe was a favourite theme of Greek art and literature. Sophocles wrote a whole play about her, of which now only a few lines are left, but many other accounts survive. The most vivid comes from the *Metamorphoses*³, an extraordinary collection of mythological transformations written by the Roman poet Ovid, which is itself a rich and untapped source of fortana.

Princess Niobe, daughter of the haughty king Tantalus, had come from Sipylus to Thebes in Greece,



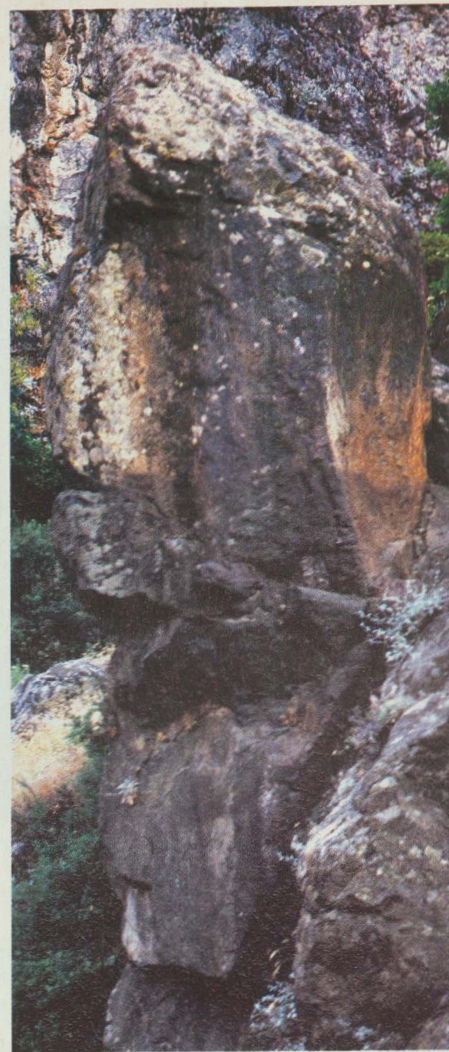


ROCK ICONS: This figure of Cybele (above) was believed to be Niobe until 1937. Right: Two more simulacra peer out from the rocks of the gorge.

where she married its ruler Amphion. Amphion could play the lyre so magically that he could charm trees and cause stones to move, a skill he employed to rebuild the walls of Thebes. The couple were blessed with many children – six sons and six daughters (or in other accounts as many as 10 of each).⁴ But Niobe's pride led to her downfall. She boasted that she had more children than the goddess Leto, who had borne only one pair of twins, Apollo and Artemis, to Zeus. Leto reported this insult to her children, who wasted no time in slaughtering all of Niobe's sons with a rain of arrows. Amphion was devastated and committed suicide. Niobe however, was unrepentant, so Apollo and Artemis shot all her daughters as well. Niobe was now so overcome with grief that Zeus turned her to stone – as an act of mercy.⁵

Ovid concluded the story with a fortaen flourish of his very own – to explain why the petrified Niobe was to be seen on Mount Sipylus, rather than at Thebes, the scene of her tragedy: "A violent whirlwind caught her up, and carried her away to her own country, where she was set down on a mountain top. There she wastes away, and even now, tears trickle from her marble face." Less adventurous mythographers said that before her miraculous transformation, she simply sailed home.

Then where exactly is Niobe? Her location was presumably preserved under the Byzantine Empire, but was then lost, probably during the Turkish invasion of the 14th century. In the 18th-century European antiquarians began the search for Niobe among the crags of Sipylus, but their first answer was hopelessly incorrect. For reasons best known to themselves, they identified 'Cybele', the Hittite sculpture of the Mother Goddess on the northern face of the mountain, with Niobe. The misidentification was repeated in the literature for nearly 100 years, until, in 1937, the orientalist Bossert was exploring the region. There he



THIS MAY HAVE BEEN A TOURIST SPOT IN ROMAN TIMES

rediscovered the indisputable original, just where Pausanias placed it – on the route up the mountain.⁶

Thanks to Bossert, Niobe is easy to find today. She is now a minor tourist attraction and the way to her is just as Pausanias described, 18 centuries earlier, as he was "climbing up the mountains to Sipylus." The easiest way to the blustery peak of Mount Sipylus (1,517 metres [5,000ft] above sea-level) is the route that curves around its north-western side – now a tarmacked road that leads to the outskirts of the Spil (Sipylus) National Park. Along the way you will find Niobe, a signposted site of great local pride.

As one walks up the slope from the road, all one sees is a stony outcrop poking out of the landscape – as Pausanias said, "nothing like a woman either grieving or otherwise." But when you go to the side she suddenly comes into focus. The crag takes on the shape of a hag-like woman with long flowing hair, craning forward with an agonised expression of abject misery. From different vantage points one can see her

'eyes' and different nuances of her expression – all made easy by the steps of the modern, cement-built 'classical' theatre which has been constructed at the right vantage point so that tourists can sit, stand and take photographs. And impressive though she is now, one can only wonder how she looked in Homer's time, without the benefit of some 3,000 years' worth of erosion, exposed to the lashing storms which are famous on the mountain.

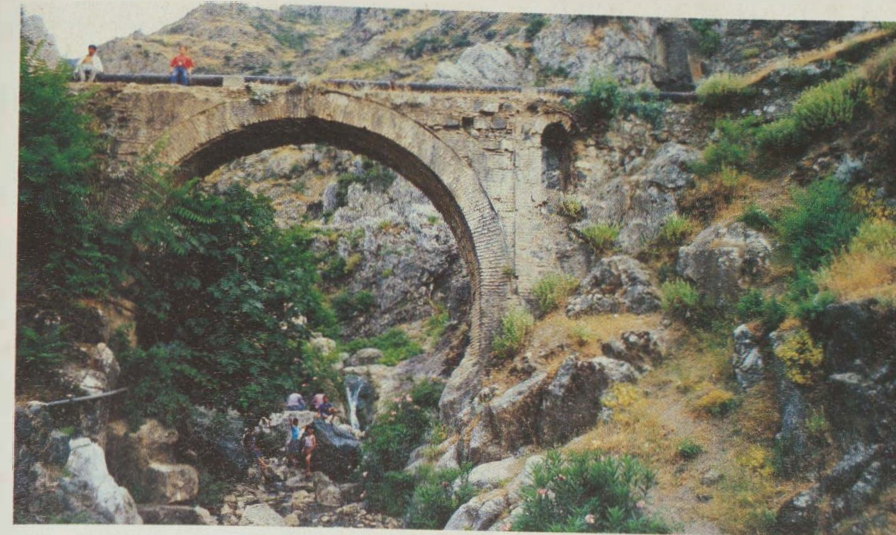
Running past the rock and along by the road down to Manisa is the stream which Pausanias mentions – "Niobe is a rock and stream." As one mounts the road, the little bridges on the way have Roman or Byzantine brick and stonework, while at the top there is part of an aqueduct of the same date. The whole setting suggests that this was a tourist spot in Roman times – perhaps after Pausanias described Niobe. Now there is a tea-shop by the aqueduct, where one can sit and view the picturesque gorge from which the stream springs.

As we sat drinking tea (and water, and Coca-Cola), much to our surprise there was another simulacrum staring at us from across the gorge – two leering faces with slanting eyes, superimposed on top of each other like a Red Indian totem pole. Not having a ladder, we couldn't examine them at first hand to see whether they were natural or man-made 'heads'. But on our second trip to Manisa in 1998, we asked local friends about these other faces and were told that there were many more further up the gorge. There's simulacra in them thar hills!

We plan to search for these extra figures on a future trip, but in the meantime it is interesting that they may, like Niobe, be referred to in Homer. He states that after being massacred by Apollo and Artemis, Niobe's children lay unburied for nine days in pools of blood – "as there was no one to bury them, the Son of Kronos [Zeus] having turned the people to stone." Thus, according to Homer, we should expect to see other simulacra in the region – those of the local people who were petrified alongside Niobe. What is baffling is why the stone at this part of the mountain should lend itself so readily to forming not just one, but a number of human forms.

One of Niobe's sons, Sipylus, was said to have given his name to the mountain. It is a name curiously garbled by an indexing error in the second edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1975). The entries directing the reader to brief discussions on the Hittite rock carvings near Manisa are split between "Sipylus, Mount" and something else called "Siphylus, in Asia Minor". Strangely enough, the unintentional joke – or typesetter's prank – might even have some sense in it. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1933), the word *syphilis* first appeared in a poem (*Syphilis, sive Morbus Gallicus*) published in 1530, written by Girolamo Fracastoro, a physician and poet of Verona. The poem related the woes of Syphilus, a shepherd described as the first sufferer from the disease. According to the *OED*, the source of this name 'Syphilus' is disputed, but the suggestion has been made that it is a mediæval corruption of Sipylus, the son of Niobe who gave his name to the mountain. The idea seems plausible, as Sipylus was an unfortunate youth struck down in his prime by Apollo, the god of plague as well as of medicine.

As for Niobe herself, what gave rise to the idea that, even turned to stone, she still wept tears over her lost children? Pausanias was sceptical of the story that the Niobe rock actually cried, and he bundled the claim together with



BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS: The aqueduct over the stream of Niobe (left) and the 'Tomb of Tantalus' (right).

other stories which he found completely ridiculous: "And they say Niobe on Mt Sipylus weeps in the summer. And there are other stories I have heard told: that griffins have spots like leopards and tritons speak in human voices, and some people say they blow through a pierced conch. People who enjoy listening to mythical stories are inclined to add even more wonders of their own, and in this way they have done injuries to the truths, which they have mixed up with a lot of rubbish."⁷

It should be explained that Pausanias had very particular views on the miraculous. He clearly believed that transformations of this kind were possible, but only in the most ancient times. This becomes crystal clear in his discussion of werewolves. In Arcadia, in central Greece, belief in werewolves was endemic. It was said that Lycaon, king of Arcadia, had once sacrificed a child to Zeus, and that, at the moment of sacrifice, Lycaon was transformed into a wolf as a punishment.⁸

Pausanias accepted this because, like all ancient Greeks, he believed that there was once a time when relations between deities and mortals had been much more intimate. But when the age of the Heroes ended, and gods and mortals no longer consorted, the golden thread was broken. In the view of men like Pausanias, miracles simply ceased to happen: "No human being ever becomes a god... and the curse of the gods is a long time falling on the wicked, and is stored away for those who have departed from this world."⁹ So when the Arcadians told him that every time a sacrifice was made to Lykaian, Zeus turned someone into a wolf, he simply deemed it impossible; things like that simply don't happen any more.

So, while Pausanias was happy to accept that Niobe was a woman who had been turned into stone in times gone by, there was no way he could accept that her "statue" still wept. But, by his very denial, Pausanias provided testimony

THE IDEA OF WEEPING STATUES HAS CONTINUED

to a belief that other ancient Greek writers refer to: it was claimed that the rock would miraculously shed tears. The usual 'rational' explanation for this is that snow collecting on the head of Niobe would melt in the spring and trickle down her nose as tears. The explanation underestimates ancient observers who, we are asked to believe, were not capable of recognising snow when they saw it; nor has anyone in modern times ever reported such a melting snow effect on Niobe's head. Besides which, Pausanias said that Niobe was supposed to weep in the summer. There is little chance of snow or ice at this time of the year at this latitude.

We are left merely guessing as to whether ancient eyewitnesses really saw the 'statue' weep and what the possible explanation might be. But whether the weeping was a real phenomenon or not, the belief was there. To the ancient Greeks, Niobe was the archetypal bereaved mother and it is remarkable that, along with this archetype, the idea that statues of the Mother can weep has continued right into the 21st century. Readers of *FT* need no reminding of the myriad claims of weeping effigies of the Virgin Mary. It would be interesting to know whether there are any other pre-Christian reports of weeping female statues, other than Niobe. In the meantime, she can claim to be not only the world's earliest known simulacrum but also the oldest weeping Madonna. The rock of Niobe draws together so



many items of mythical and paranormal interest from the Greek world that she is almost the quintessential fortaen monument.

There is one final mystery attached to her. Perhaps the most surprising thing about the Niobe rock is the miracle of her survival. Sipylus is subject to frequent and violent earthquakes. One of the worst occurred in AD17; its results, in the words of one recent Roman scholar, "were comparable to a biblical catastrophe."¹⁰ Twelve neighbouring cities were flattened by an earthquake during the night. Tacitus talks of "fugitives being swallowed up in yawning chasms. Accounts are given of huge mountains sinking, of former plains seen heaved aloft, and of fire gashing out amid the ruin." The damage was assessed by a massive relief programme organised by the Emperor Tiberius, and Magnesia was rated as the second most serious casualty.

The power of even the relatively small earthquakes experienced in modern times is vividly shown by the serious cracks which have already appeared in the cement-built theatre opposite Niobe. Somehow this curious overhanging chunk of rock has survived for nearly 3,000 years, at least since the time of Homer. It seems that when Zeus sentenced Niobe to be perpetually frozen in stone, "brooding on the desolation that the gods dealt out to her" (Homer), he really meant it. Not even Poseidon, the mighty Earthshaker, can countermand the wishes of Zeus. **FT**

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING

KEY BOOKS ON THIS SUBJECT

- The Sunken Kingdom (Cape, 1995)**
Peter James
- Aegean Turkey (Benn, 1996)**
George Bean

RECOMMENDED SURFING

KEY WEBSITES ON THIS SUBJECT

The Sunken Kingdom: The Atlantis Mystery Solved
www.knowledge.co.uk/xxx/cat/james

Books and research projects of Peter James and colleagues
www.centuries.co.uk

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6 See G Bean: *Aegean Turkey* (1968), pp54–55.

7 Pausanias: *Guide to Greece*, VIII, 2, 7.

8 For Pausanias' views on the Lycaon cult and werewolves see D Hughes: *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (1991), pp96–107.

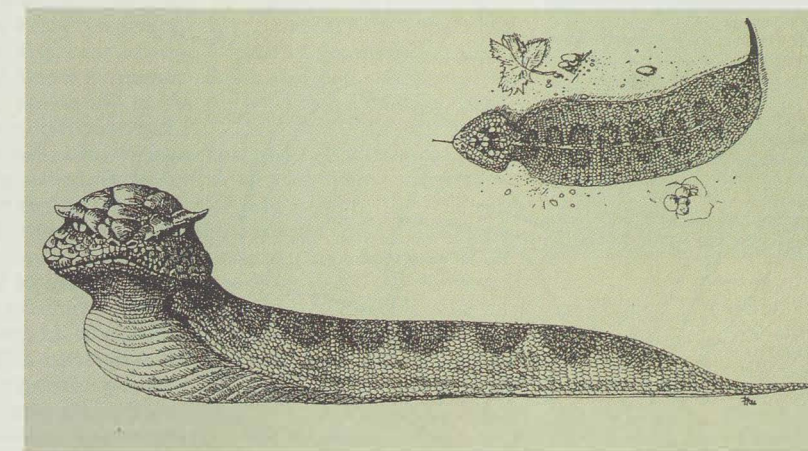
9 Pausanias: *Guide to Greece*, VIII, 2, 5.

8 N Kokkinos: *Antonia Augusta: Portrait of a Great Roman Lady* (London: Routledge, 1992), p48.

REPORTS OF A BIZARRE UNKNOWN SNAKE HAVE GOT JAPANESE CRYPTOZOOLOGISTS IN A FLAP, BUT **DR KARL SHUKER** SUSPECTS THAT A CRYPTO-IMPOSTER APPEARS TO BE AT LARGE.

Predictably, Yoshii was soon awash in bounty-hunting tourists, anxious to bag one of these elusive beasts. But even if they didn't (which

One of the most memorable testimonies to emerge from this investigation was that of 82-year-old Yoshii resident Mitsuko Arima, who allegedly sighted a tzuchinoko as recently as the morning of 15 June, swimming along a river: "I was surprised. I just pointed at it and asked 'Who are you? Who are you?'. It didn't answer me, but just stared. It had a round face and didn't take its eyes off me. I can still see the eyes now. They were big and round and it looked like they were floating on the water. I've lived over 80 years, but I'd never seen anything like that in my life."



Satoh revealed that he had been able to reconstruct the dead snake's bone structure from its remains, and he estimated its total length at 120cm (3ft 11in). Its largest ventral scales were 49.5mm (2in) across, and the morphology of its dorsal scales corresponded with those of Japan's tiger water snake *Rhabdophis tigrinus*, a venomous colubrid. Also consistent with this species was a small fang found on the dead snake's maxillæ. Consequently, Satoh concluded that this was indeed the identity of the latter specimen (though conceding that it was a notably large one). As this species is very visibly dissimilar from the classic tzuichinoko description, which is much closer to that of pit vipers, the good citizens of Yoshii were presumably led astray in their assumptions that they had sighted tzuichinokos in 2000 – seemingly by a snake in the grass that proved to be a serpent of the water, and not a tobleronic tzuichinoko after all.

DR KARL SHUKER
is a zoological consultant, lecturer and author of many books about cryptozoology.

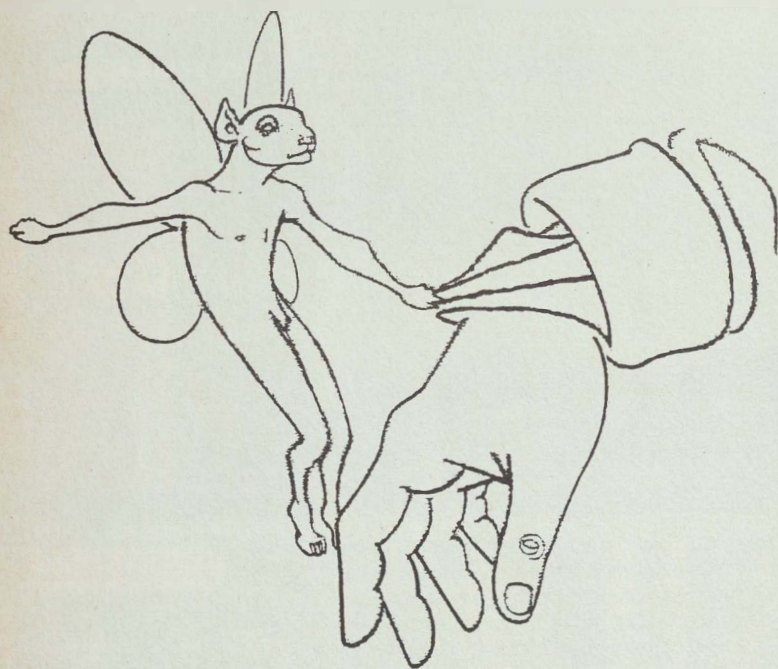
FT142 | 45



Astray with the fairies

PATRICK HARPUR FINDS THAT IT'S EASY TO GET LURED OFF THE BEATEN TRACK WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH THE LITTLE PEOPLE.

In his book *Mysteries*, Colin Wilson describes an odd experience which occurred at the Cornish stone circle called Boscawen-un in 1975. Visiting it with some friends, who only had half an hour before they had to be taken to catch a train, he decided to nip over to a little hilltop, about 450 yards (411m) away, to inspect a landmark called the Giant's footprint. However, what with the bracken holding him up, he found that he did not have time after all to make the landmark, and turned back. The stone circle was no longer visible, but the



countryside there is open and he clearly saw the direction he had come from. He plodded downhill. Then, to his amazement, he found he was lost. He bore left, towards the path at the bottom of the hill, but reached a wall, which he climbed over, and found himself in a strange field. It took him half an hour to get back to the stone circle; and he could not work out how he had got lost – to end up at the main road, as he had, he must have gone in the opposite direction to the one he intended.

Wilson is inclined to subscribe to the theory that such disorientation can be triggered by 'nodal points' where leys intersect. But there is a more traditional explanation: he was pixy- or pixie-led – 'pixy-leading is perhaps the commonest of the fairy experiences in modern times,' remarks the folklorist Katharine Briggs. It takes two related forms: either one finds oneself utterly lost, often in a usually familiar place; or one finds oneself unable to find a way out of an ordinary place, such as a field.

In 1928, Gwen Herbert was riding on a part

of Dartmoor she knew well on a fine bright day. "I was suddenly – to use a Dartmoor expression – 'mazed'. I knew the places yet was utterly befogged. I felt I was pixy lead, and started to turn my pockets inside out. While I was doing so, I suddenly knew where I was exactly." Turning your pockets or coat inside out is held to break fairy enchantments, but just as often, it seems, it does not. Mrs Herbert was lucky; so was John Rivers of Galway who, in *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, is reported by Lady Gregory as saying: "Once I was led astray in that field and went round and round and could find no way out – till at last I thought of the old Irish fashion of turning my waistcoat and that did the trick."

'Astray' rather than pixy-led is what the Irish call this enchantment. "My father was led astray one time," related another Galway man, "when he was coming home from a neighbour's house, and he was led here and there till he didn't know what way he was going. And then the moon began to shine out and he saw his shadow, and another shadow along with it 10 feet (3m) in length. So with that he ran, and when he got to the wood of Cloon he fell down in a faint." This experience is also called 'the stray sod', following the belief that the fairies put a spell on a sod of grass so that whoever steps on it loses his way or cannot find an exit from the place he is in.

In *The Middle Kingdom*, Dermot MacManus tells us how the Reverend Harris, rector of a parish on the Leitrim/Roscommon border, set off on Midsummer's Day 1916 to visit a sick parishioner who lived about seven miles (11km) away by road, but only about three by the footpath over the hills. He knew the path well, and although it was 10pm, it was still light. Entering a field via a five-barred gate, he followed the path to the stile on the other side. But when he got there, there was no stile. Thinking he must have wandered off the path, he followed the hedge round. Still no stile. He retraced his steps, as he thought, to the gate – but that, too, had disappeared, along with the path that led to it. He walked the whole perimeter of the hedge, scrutinising it for any opening, until he arrived back at the place he had started from. There was no way out. He searched for another two hours until, suddenly, the spell was lifted and he easily found the gate and stile where they should have been all along.

An even stranger tale of MacManus's concerns a 19-year-old girl, companion to his aunt, who went on her day off to visit a neighbour. When she had not returned for supper at 7pm, search parties were dispatched. They looked everywhere for her until, at about midnight, the girl turned up at the house and collapsed in tears. She had made a detour, she explained, to climb Lis Ard, the famous 'fairy fort' on MacManus land. She had climbed the slope of the hill around which the bank and ditch of the 'fort' ran, and walked through the beech wood on the top. However, when she tried to leave, walking towards a gap in the bank, she felt "a queer kind of jerk, a muscular jerk inside her rather than from outside, and before she realised what had happened she found herself walking quickly in the opposite direction." When she turned and headed once again for the gap, the same thing happened. Whatever way she tried to get out, she felt as if there was an invisible barrier preventing her. As darkness fell, she became increasingly desperate, afraid to stop following the encircling barrier around the hill. She even saw a search party, and could hear them calling out for her; but they neither saw her nor heard her cries. At last, all of a sudden, the barrier seemed to lift; and, terrified and exhausted, she made her way home.

Where are the stray sods of today, I'd like to know? Perhaps we encounter them more often than we know, but overlook them, preferring to believe we have misread a map. A Nick Hunt of Brighton wrote in to the mag *UFO Reality* (Aug/Sept 1996) to say that he and two friends had seen a long tubular UFO on the way back from a UFO conference in Wales. Having spent the night at Avebury, they left for home at noon. "After being on the road for nearly an hour we pulled over to get our bearings, and there was a sign that read something like 'A36 – 30 miles'. We were unaware of going round in circles, but after a further 3 hours we found ourselves back in exactly the same position! [...] No extra fuel was consumed during the three hours we were driving."

PATRICK HARPUR

is a Dorset-based writer and the author of *Mercurius* (1990) and *Daimonic Reality* (1995). His new book *The Philosophers' Secret Fire* is published in 2001.



The Pope must die

GARRICK ALDER UNRAVELS THE TANGLED WEB OF INTRIGUE AND IDEOLOGY BEHIND THE RECENT REVELATION OF THE THIRD SECRET OF FATIMA.

Amid all the hoo-ha surrounding the release of the Third Secret of Fatima, the events to which the prophecy itself allegedly refers – the attempt to kill Pope John Paul II, in May, 1981 – seem to have merited very little attention. A look at some developments in the ongoing investigation into the Pope's brush with death can cast an interesting light on the recent revelation of the Third Secret.

"Conspiracy" is an overused word today, but, at the same time, the attack on the Pope is now regarded by most official investigators as the result of a conspiracy masterminded by the KGB and carried out by the Bulgarian Government and the terrorist organisation The Grey Wolves, who, between them, manipulated a young man into pulling the trigger. Claims of a conspiracy to kill the Pope began to circulate soon after Mehmet Ali Agca's shots echoed in St Peter's Square, on the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, 13 May 1981. The KGB were fingered as chief suspects. The entire Soviet bloc was seen as being threatened by the new Pope's links with his homeland, Poland, which was then still struggling to cast off its oppressive and atheistic regime. The staunchly Soviet Bulgarians were suspected as the KGB's agents in the assault.

In 1997, Italian Judge Ferdinando Imposimato broke a long silence to reveal that he had been taken off the Agca case in 1985, "just as we were coming to a conclusion over the KGB and Bulgarian connection." But the documents he had seen left him "in no doubt" that the KGB, in the form of its then-head Yuri Andropov, wanted the Pope dead. Imposimato, speaking in 1997, said that the knowledge of this connection had become "inconvenient" in 1985, as Western powers sought to build a relationship with the Kremlin's 'new broom', Mikhail Gorbachev. His superiors had repeatedly urged him to "let it go", but he had decided to make public his theory in the light of the recent confession by Oral Celick, a Turkish former member of The Grey Wolves. Celick claimed to have been in St Peter's Square with Agca, and said that he had also fired at the Pope.

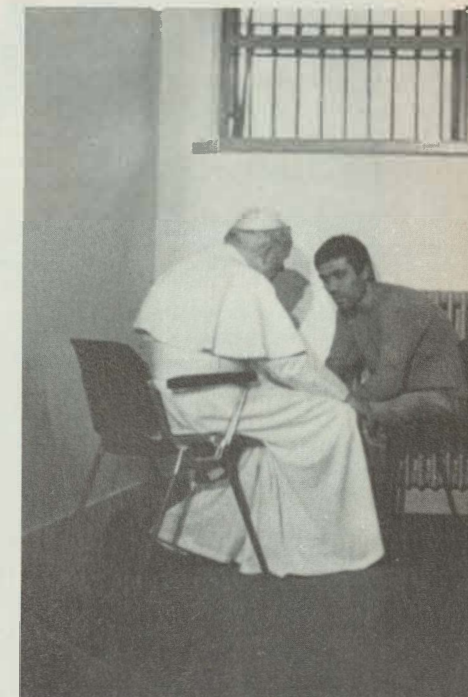
Imposimato announced: "I can confirm that Celick was indeed there, although the bullets that were fired at the Pope were Agca's. More than that, there were two Bulgarian diplomats close by with a getaway car: Ivan Dontchev, who was listed as cultural attaché, and Sotir Kolev, also known as Theodore Ayvazov." The subsequent acquittal by a Roman court of Bulgarian officials was, he said, "politically inspired." Agca himself, Imposimato claimed, was "perfectly lucid and intelligent", and only maintained publicly that he had acted alone. In private, he said, Agca was beginning to talk to investigators about the conspiracy to kill the Pope. "You have no idea of the obstacles we encountered at international levels when we came to our conclusion, or the superficiality with which some key investigations were conducted," Imposimato declared.¹

Late in November 1999, Imposimato's theories received firm support from the publication, by *Il Giorno*, of seized Soviet documents now held by Sisdé, Italy's counter-intelligence agency. Two KGB operations, code named Pagoda and Infection, were apparently instigated mere hours after the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła to the Papacy. The papers instructed Soviet bloc agents to "discredit the church and the Pope with disinformation and provocations that do not exclude his physical elimination." The Vatican declined to comment on the release of these papers, which was strange, considering that it hadn't been slow in denouncing as "absurd and fanciful" and "infamous rubbish" David Yallop's book *In God's Name*, a masterful investigation into the highly-suspicious death of Pope John Paul I. Enzo Fraga, of Italy's right-wing Alleanza Nazionale party, was less hesitant, declaring: "The Soviets succeeded in organising a frontal attack on the Vatican and the Pope." The Italian parliament's fraught Terrorism Commission has promised to investigate all the allegations, drawing on a further 600 further pages of Czech documents, handed over in 1990 by Vaclav Havel. The date of the Commission's report has not yet been announced.²

These developments are even more interesting in the light of a book published in 1996. The Watergate journalist Carl Bernstein and the Italian investigator Marco Politi co-authored a startling biography of the Pope, entitled *His Holiness John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time*. In this, Bernstein and Politi reveal that William Casey, CIA Director during Ronald Reagan's presidency, regularly visited the Pope with spy-satellite photos, transcripts from surveillance operations in the USSR and accounts of White House meetings. In return, John Paul II would brief Casey on what his church sources were reporting in the eastern bloc countries. The two leaders became very close, having shared (within six weeks of each other) the experience of an assassination attempt. On one occasion, Casey brought a gift from Reagan: a spy satellite photograph of the epoch-making mass that the Pope had celebrated in Victory Square, Warsaw. In it, John Paul II was just visible, a tiny white dot in all that humanity. The White House, Bernstein and Politi claim, regarded the Vatican as a sort of spiritual superpower, and even gave the Pope advance warning of Soviet troop movements around Poland. Uber-spook Casey, a devout Catholic, made no secret during his visits of his conviction that Bulgaria was behind the attempt on the Pope's life.³

So it looks more and more as though the Pope's shooting was indeed the result of his personal interest in a global conflict of ideologies. The resonances with the Roman crucifixion of Christ could hardly be more apparent. Except, in this latter-day Passion story, the Vicar of Christ on Earth survives the plot to kill him, and leads his suffering flock to freedom. The corrupt ideology falls, and the world is safe from annihilation. No wonder that John Paul II refuses to consider abdication.

In 1983, John Paul had visited his would-be assassin, Ali Agca, in prison (above). The two men talked in private for over an hour, and were photographed together, shaking hands, the Pope having forgiven Agca personally.⁴ Perhaps coincidentally, Agca later began calling upon the Vatican to "reveal the third secret". "It was written," Agca elaborated in 1997; "a supernatural force pushed me to do it."⁵ Perhaps, one might speculate, this is the reasoning behind the Italian Government's decision (of 13 June 2000) to pardon Agca, who will be deported to Turkey, to serve another sentence for an unrelated killing.⁶ As John Paul II himself remarked during his first visit to Fatima, one year after his shooting: "In the designs of Providence, there are no coincidences."⁷ Having fast-tracked the canonisation of Tsar Nicholas II and his family,⁸ John Paul II plans to visit Russia before the end of the year, to put the final seal on the collapse of what an old ally of his once memorably referred to as the "Evil Empire."⁹



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GARRICK ALDER

is a longtime forteen and veteran FT correspondent.



A drop in the ocean

THE NORTH POLAR ICE CAP HAS SHRUNK FROM 9FT TO JUST A FEW INCHES THICK FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 55 MILLION YEARS. EVEN SO, WILLIAM NEIL REFUSES TO DON HIS WADERS YET.

Many scientific prophecies warn us of the doom ahead through global warming, when many of us will drown under floods as the ice melts and the seas rise.

The ultimate situation, called equilibrium by the global warming community, is when all the ice has melted, the seas have risen, and everything is calm again. But calculating the interim, or transient process, during which the ice is melting, and scaring us all rigid, is a horrendous mathematical problem, involving vector analysis, calculus and other mathematical tools whose very names instil awe and obedience. No one dares challenge these mathematical prophecies, mainly because we are never shown the figures, and even if we were the majority of us feel that we wouldn't have a clue what they were talking about anyway, and feel that they would only baffle us with scientific gobbledegook. Naturally, these maths equations require the manipulation of dozens of variables in huge computers, costing billions of pounds in machines and staff. The message that comes out, just as in religion, is have faith, your priests will guide you, believe in us, we have the truth. And, like most religious suckers, we do just that.

But why not avoid the transient journey, where we are tortured daily about our slow approach to inundation by water, and jump straight to the end point equilibrium? That way we can see how much the Global Ocean will rise if all the land ice and sea ice melt.

The Global Ocean is just that, all the seawater on Earth. The land ice is that which sits, literally, on dry land on Antarctica, Greenland, N Canada, and N Russia, with some additional small amounts as mountain top ice and glaciers. Sea ice, as the name implies, floats in the sea and consists of the polar ice cap (also known as the north pole, or the Arctic), and icebergs. The question therefore is a simple one: what would be the enlarged volume of the Global Ocean if all of the ice on Earth melted and turned to water which then flowed into the sea, and how would the sea's volume, and hence its height, increase over the surface of the Earth in that event?

But first a word about sea ice, or floating ice. The Arctic, and icebergs, are floating ice whose volume is larger than it is in its water form (that's why we get burst pipes in the winter). Also, as it floats, a small portion of it is above the surface of the water in which it is floating. These two factors mean that when floating ice melts it does not increase the water level of the water in which it is floating. Incidentally, all frozen seawater eventually turns to fresh water as the salt is extruded under pressure of the freezing process. Try this at home: half fill a large glass with ice cubes and then top it up with water to a tape marker on the side of the glass; come back when the ice has melted. There is no change in the water level; in fact the water level has dropped very slightly.

This is a very important point, as several experts would have us believe that if the Arctic melts, the seas will rise. This is not the case. Let's

repeat that; sea ice, which includes the polar ice cap, and all icebergs, on melting, will not increase the sea level.

To explain the volumes involved, and to support the case argued here, it will be necessary to introduce a few numbers to show the reader that these are simple facts, and not just opinions. So, if anyone missed out on the six-times multiplication table at school, they should skip to the next article.

We are talking big numbers here, so, in order to make it easier to read, the volumes will be quoted in units for the purpose of clarity, where one unit is a million cubic kilometres.

The biggest block of ice is on, and around, Antarctica. This continent is vast; it is one-and-a-half times larger than the USA, and nearly one-and-a-half times Australia. It is covered in deep land ice, and surrounded by sea ice. Check this out ask a friend how big it is in, say, relation to Great Britain, and watch them say about the same size.

It is known that Antarctica contains 90 per cent of the world's ice (sea and land), and the world total of ice is 33.33 units. The other 10 per cent is locked up at the sites mentioned earlier (e.g. the polar ice cap etc). Of this 10 per cent, about half is at the Arctic, that is, five per cent which can be discounted (in terms of raising the ocean if it melts) as it floats. This leaves 1.67 units of non-Antarctica land ice.

Antarctica's total volume of ice is 30 units, of which 3.3 units are sea ice, and this 3.3 can be ignored as it is floating. Adding Antarctica's land ice to the rest of the world's land ice, (1.67 + 26.7) units gives a volume of 28.37 units, which, if melted, would flow into the Global Ocean and raise its level.

Now, the Global Ocean's total volume of seawater is, as every schoolboy knows, 1,371 units, and its surface area is 364 million sq km (140 million sq miles).

In order to calculate the difference in height before and after ice melt-down, first the present depth is calculated by dividing 1,371 by 364, to give 3.766 km. Next, the melted ice volume of 28.37 is added to 1,371, to give a new Global Ocean of 1,399 units. Using the same surface area, the sums produce a new depth of 3.844 km (2.389 miles). (This is valid, because, in fact, though the new surface area would be slightly larger following a sea rise, that would make the new depth look even smaller, so here the worse case scenario is adopted of assuming it stays the same).

The difference between the old and new sea levels is 3.844 km minus 3.766 km, or 0.078 km, or 78 m (229 ft). Not quite a drop in the ocean.

There is an interesting parallel here because, at the end of the last ice age (circa 10,000 BC), the seas had risen by about 107 m (351 ft), to give the present-day sea levels. Before the last ice age vast quantities of water were piled up on the poles, as ice. It is therefore clear that the poles of 15,000 BC were much larger than the ones we have today. Professor Charles Hapgood put forward the thesis that it was precisely this colossal build-up of ice (lowering the seas by 107 m) during the ice age, which destabilised the planet, causing it to wobble and shift the poles into warmer climes, resulting in a restabilising meltdown. Einstein supported Professor Hapgood's calculations (see ref. 5).

On this occasion, however, the process claimed as "global warming," if such exists, would be a gradual progression quite unlike the catastrophic events suggested by Hapgood, when indescribable floods swept across the Earth. And, what is more, much of the Earth's dry land is in fact more than 78 m above today's sea level. In fact, Antarctica is the highest continent on Earth with an average elevation of 1,981 m (presumably he means 1,981 m) (6,500 ft), with Asia next at 975 m (3,200 ft) and Australia last at 248 m (814 ft). If the ice was to melt off Antarctica, the removal of its colossal weight would allow the continent to rise even further out of the sea. The result would be the addition of a major dry-land continent to the planet, and would probably cancel out the loss of river deltas and other low lying land, providing a net gain of land. So, not all bad news then.

NOTE

There is a phenomenon called Thermal Expansion of the oceans, which, at 50°C a rise of 10°C causes an increase of water volume of 1 part in 10,000; at 250°C a rise of 10°C causes an increase of 3 parts in 10,000. For instance, if the top 100 m of ocean were at 250°C, a rise to 260°C would increase its depth by 3 cm (see ref. 3).

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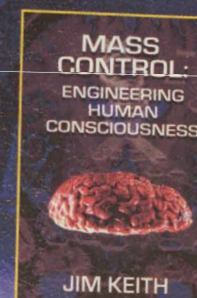


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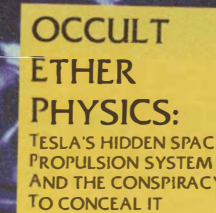
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Shark's Dinner

The report of a fisherman's head found inside a cod [FT140:26] reminded me of what happened to my great-great-uncle Thomas Gallienne. In 1863, at the age of 23, he sailed from Liverpool to Australia as second mate on the infamous emigrant ship Rockhampton. In 1875, aged 35, while working off the coast of Brisbane, he was taken by a 12ft 6in (3.8m) shark after his small boat capsized. His shipmates managed to swim to the shore. On the day following, two sharks, which had been seen the day before, revisited the main vessel and one of them was caught. When it was cut open the sailors found Tom's head, one arm and the greater part of one leg. The head and features were perfect with only a slight scratch on the nose. The two earrings he was wearing were removed. One was given to his young widow and one to his brother John Gallienne, my great-grandfather who lived in Liverpool.

The details of how Tom met his death were kept from his wife and two young sons who were allowed to believe that he had simply drowned. His shipmates who knew the truth, gathered up what remains there were and buried them on a 10-acre uninhabited island surrounded by a reef located in Keppel Bay, near Brisbane. A head board was painted with his name and fixed over a simple grave covered with stones and timber.

John Glover
by email

Bees' Flight

John H McMasters tracked down the origin of the bumblebees-can't-fly myth [FT137:27] in "The Flight of the Bumblebee and Related Myths of Entomological Engineering" (*American Scientist* 1989, Vol 77, March-April, 164-169).

I quote: "It is known that the bumblebee story was already circulating in German technical universities in the early 1930s, apparently beginning in the circle of students surrounding... Ludwig Prandtl at Göttingen. The identity of the specific

aerodynamicist continued to elude me until recently, when I learned from a reliable source that a possible candidate may be a Swiss professor (now deceased) who became famous for his pioneering work in supersonic gas dynamics in the 1930s and 1940s. In the received story, the aerodynamicist was engaged one evening in a light dinner-party conversation with a biologist, who asked in passing for enlightenment about the aerodynamic capabilities of the wings of bees and wasps. Intrigued by the question, the aerodynamicist did some preliminary calculations based on the assumption that the wings were more-or-less smooth, flat plates... The resulting calculations 'proved' the bee to be incapable of flight."

McMasters relates how, realising there had to be a mistake in his assumptions, the frustratingly

(covering a wide area, therefore not very detailed) a thumb's width might mean several miles, but on a large-scale chart it might represent just a few tens of metres. Thus the Rule of Thumb automatically provides a safety margin appropriate to the scale of the chart.

I suspect the origin of the term actually comes from carpenters' use of the first joint of the thumb as about one inch, a use still prevalent even in France long after metrication. French boatbuilders still frequently refer to boat lengths in feet.

Roger Downham
Penryn, Cornwall

The original rule of the thumb was the accepted standard measurement of one inch (as used by carpenters): the distance across the first knuckle. This was later substituted by the far more accurate standard of three ears of wheat laid end to end. I seem to recall the later standard was attributed to King John.

Graham Smith
By email

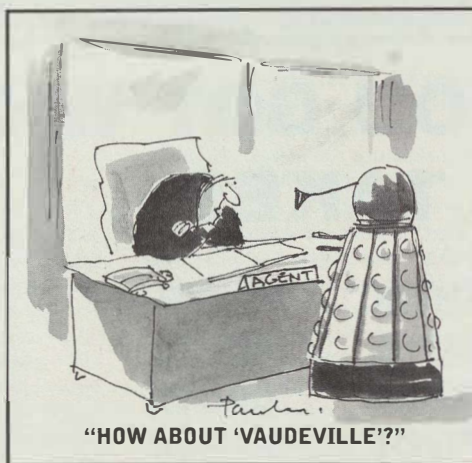
Spear of destiny

The article on the Spear of Destiny [FT140:66] states that "In 1938, Hitler obtained the Spear from the Hapsburg treasure house... [and] could not be defeated until he lost possession of it". For many years before this, it was in the hands of Austria-Hungary, throughout the period in which the Austro-Hungarian Empire was resoundingly defeated and dismantled and the Hapsburgs toppled from power, before passing to the new, reduced Austria, where it remained until Austria was wiped off the map by Germany. After its capture by the Americans, General Eisenhower gave it away, shortly before being elected President of the United States and leading America to undisputed world domination.

Perhaps next time a trade war looms, Austria could present the Spear to Japan as a gift?

Aidan Merritt
London

Editor's note: There are at least three other relics purporting to be the Spear of Destiny (see FT70:36).



"HOW ABOUT VAUDEVILLE?"

anonymous aerodynamicist went on to examine bees' wings under a microscope. He discovered that they actually approximated an aerofoil cross-section - but in the meantime the story of his "proof" had leaked out among the students, and it has been circulating ever since.

Grant Hutchison
Dundee, Tay

Rule of Thumb

Regarding 'Rule of thumb' [FT139:27]: students of navigation are sometimes taught to lay off courses which are at least a thumb's width clear (on a chart) of marked dangers such as sunken rocks. If you have a small-scale chart



SLEMEN LOGO

I was about to surf the net when the mysterious "SLEMEN" logo (discussed in FT123:51) appeared on my monitor screen. I clicked on it and a drop-down menu slid down from the icon. The menu read: "Supersearch engines", "AnswerUned" and "UltraFind". The strange thing is, even after I had restarted the computer offline, the Slemen logo reappeared. I have a friend who knows everything about HTML, Java and Flash, and he was at a complete loss to explain what the logo was and how the invasive icon had set itself up on my system. The logo resisted Norton antivirus software; then, as mysteriously as it had appeared, the logo vanished with a ping sound.

Stephen Doran
Cambridge

Black Sedans

Regarding mysterious black cars around airforce bases [FT139:52]: during my tour with the US Army's Military Intelligence, I worked for PIC-K (Photo Interpretation Center - Korea) in Yongsan Barracks, Seoul. I had a Top Secret, SBI (Special Background Investigation) clearance. At times our mission was to pick up 'hot rolls' from Osan AFB. These were classified reconnaissance satellite and reconnaissance aircraft photos of Red China and North Korea. The vehicles we drove were black sedans with tinted windows and no license plates. We kept a 'No Stopping This Vehicle' sign available for any police that were ignorant of our safety route. All local police were informed of our mission and would not pull us over. Many times we went over the speed limit. What C Haynes most likely saw was Air Force Intelligence Officers delivering or picking up classified information.

Paul Dale Roberts
Elk Grove, California

Dracula Hogwash

I was astonished to read your report "Dracula was from Derry" [FT138:10]. With half-hearted attempts at research like: "Stoker might well have read..." "It might indeed have been the inspiration for..." "Castle of the Blood Visage... allegedly a fortress guarding a lonely pass (which lonely pass?) in McGillicuddy Reeks..." "Dreach-Fhoula, (pronounced droc-ola)..." Spare us!

It is well known that Bram Stoker did a great deal of research on Transylvania and Romania and the wealth of material on Transylvanian and Trans-Balkan habitats of the vampire. The book specifically states that the Count was the undead incarnation of the man called Vlad

the Impaler, the 15th century warlord. Vlad tasted human blood and flesh, he crucified and impaled hundreds of thousands of people - and was an acceptable candidate for the evil Count Dracula, especially since the Impaler's name was Dracula!

In Stoker's book, Van Helsing says: "...He must indeed have been the Voivode Dracula, who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of Turkey-Land. If it be so, then he was no common man; for centuries after, he was spoken of as the cleverest and most cunning, as well as the bravest of the Sons of the 'Land Beyond the Forest.'"

And what is this quotation from Professor Sabina Ispas, Director of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Romania, trying to persuade people that Romania itself has no vampire folklore? I guess all the ethno-historians and ethnographers since the 18th century were simply making up the legends of vampirism from the Baltic to the Balkans to sell books?

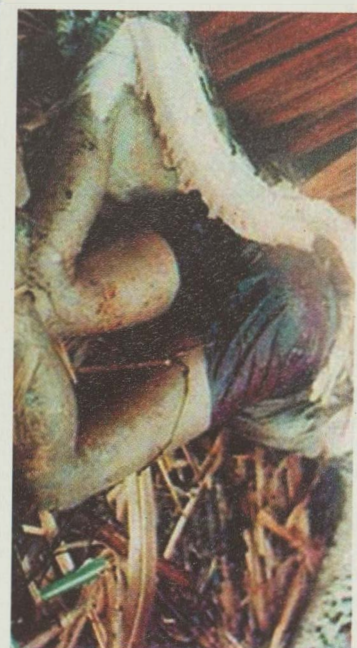
David T St Albans
whisperindave@email.msn.com

Raining Turtles

On 3 September this year, a friend and I were walking in the National Woodland about three miles (5km) South of Quiaios on the West coast of Portugal. We must have been almost two miles (3.2km) inland and were surrounded by eucalyptus trees. As we followed a badly-defined track, we noticed a thing up ahead that resembled a pile of oily leather. This turned out to be the carcass of a three foot (1m) long leatherback turtle in a fairly advanced state of decay. We were perplexed. There was no obvious sign of a trail that the creature could have made, and it seems unlikely that it would have come so far from the sea of its own volition. The most obvious explanation is that somebody, or something, put it

there. Perhaps a local fisherman hauled the smelly thing up in his nets and decided to dump it?

Malcolm Sewell
Coimbra, Portugal



Snake Photo Fake?

The San Fernando Valley Folklorists' Society (on their wildly popular website, www.snopes.com) debunks the photo you recently printed of a man eaten by a python [FT140:26]. If the legs belong to a man eaten while having a slash, he evidently hasn't removed his shorts as part of the procedure.

Pab Schwendimann
New Mexico

Editor's note: Perhaps the victim had time to pull up his shorts before being consumed. It should have been made clear that the report of a Nigerian oil worker eaten by a python was unconnected to the photographs, the provenance of which were unknown to FT at the time of publication.



Potent Brews

If there are any readers (like me) who can't afford £89.95 for a litre and a half of absinthe, they might try making their own: get some 140° proof Polish vodka, convince a "wise woman" or herbalist to prescribe you some wormwood, and steep the one in the other until Thujone, the psychoactive component, releases. You might kill yourself, but at less damage to your bank balance.

Infusing psychoactive plants in alcohol has a long history: the Roman poet Martial, a fine writer but no ethnobotanist, complains that his doctor has put wormwood in his wine (book 9, poem 94). Plants containing the deliriant hallucinogen scopolamine were most often so used; belladonna was added to wine for the violent Bacchanalian orgies, and Roman priests drank a similar mixture before invoking the Roman goddess of war, Bellona. Old Germanic tribes used to add henbane to their beer; this practice continues today with datura (Tanzania) and brugmansia seeds (South American Indians). Closest to absinthe would be the mandrake-infused bourbon used ceremonially by Anton La Vey - the most evil drink known to man or woman.

Scopolamine has been known to induce terrifying visions of "monsters and giant bats"; I've often wondered whether John Flaxton and pals had taken some "witches' brew" before their encounter with the bat-winged, web-footed cryptid in 1963.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

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Readers' Rules

My husband and I enjoy the magazine so much we've had to negotiate a truce over it: we take turns reading it first, and the first reader must not howl with laughter, read any of it aloud, point out articles, or in any way dilute the second reader's experience. The penalty is, of course, forfeiture of turn as first reader.

Anne Olson
aecker@juno.com

More Twenty-sevens

Regarding the significance of the number 27 [FT139:50]: the two books of prophecy in the Bible, Daniel and Revelation, are the 27th books in the Old and New Testaments respectively. Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones and Janis Joplin all died aged 27. Just a coincidence? Bill Owen starred in *The Last of the Summer Wine* for 27 years. We are not alone.

The Lord's Messenger
Belfast BT27



Eerie Message

In response to Rob Dickinson's letter [FT139:51]. I was really surprised to read that somebody else could remember the ghost telephone line where, as I recall it, all that was said was "Suzie's dying; help her" continuously. Only a couple of weeks before reading this I'd been talking to some colleagues about the 'ghost line' but nobody else seemed to have heard of it. I am now wondering if it was a local broadcast as I'm from Burnley, only a couple of miles from Worsthorne, where Rob is from. If anyone can shed any light on this I'd appreciate it as this has got me really intrigued.

Sarah Needham
Burnley, Lancashire

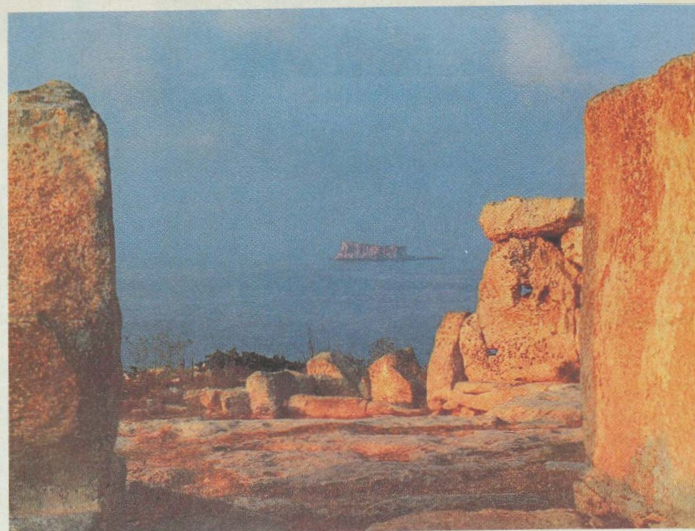
Alabama Geography

As chance would have it, I was reading Mark Warner's letter about an unexplained offal spill on the highway [FT139:51] during a car trip through Alabama and decided to have a look at the map to see how close I was to the little towns mentioned in this letter. The intersection of I-159 and Highway 31, which is put forth in the letter as being the first sign of civilisation after a long drive on a lonely country road is in fact in the centre of Birmingham, not far from the court house and art museum. There is an Alabaster and a Montevallo and a secondary road, Highway 119, connects them but there is no Highway 115 intersecting anywhere in the vicinity, at least on my map. Too bad. Perhaps the experience happened in a parallel Alabama.

Anne Olson
aecker@juno.com

FORKED LIZARDS

This photograph shows the tiny island of Filfla, viewed from the Neolithic temple at Mnajdra (+2700 BC) on the south-west coast of Malta. During my holiday there this summer, my Maltese friends told me that this island is locally famous for its two-tailed lizards. These have come about because Filfla has been used for artillery target practice continuously since the time of Napoleon, and supposedly the constant bombardment and consequent injuries to the local wildlife so confused the regenerative powers of the lizards that they would sometimes get injured and begin growing a new tail before the old one was finished. Eventually, all the lizards came to have two tails all the time. If true, this would finally vindicate Larmarck. Unfortunately, nobody seems keen to go over



there and test the folk myth with observation; the island is officially barred to the public because of the huge numbers of dangerous unexploded munitions that have

accumulated over the last 200 hundred years. Believe it or not.

Karl Gallagher
Portsmouth, Hampshire

Wandering Jew on Wild hunt

In response to the recent letters from Graham Darlow and Rhys Davies [FT138:50] commenting on Roy Bainton's "Mischief Myths" [FT136:34-38] I include the following extract from Venetia Newall's article, "The Jew as a Witch Figure" (in *The Witch Figure*, edited by Venetia Newall, 1973. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) in which some of the associations between the legends of the Wandering Jew and the Wild Hunt become apparent:

"Unlimited in space, age, time, location and size, the isolation of the Wandering Jew is underlined by the theme, common to many versions of the legend, that he cannot remain still, but must always pace perpetually to and fro. 'He is as restless as the Wandering Jew' is a Hungarian saying carried to its most extreme form in the association of the Wandering Jew with the birds of the air. There is a Lancashire tradition that the whistling golden plover embody the Wandering Jew: they are said to be the souls of those who assisted at the Crucifixion and were doomed to wander forever after. Here is an aetiological legend purporting to account for the curious whistling cry of these and other types of bird, which fly overhead uttering an eerie, almost human, sound which struck fear into the hearts of those who heard them. Also known as the Seven Whistlers, they foretold death and disaster. Seven Whistlers are souls of Jews who crucified Christ' is Motif A1715.3 in Stith Thompson's Motif Index of Folk Literature.

"The Seven Whistlers are also associated with the death hounds

that accompany the Wild Hunt. In northern Europe the storms and gales of winter gave rise to a belief in supernatural beings passing through the air, making a terrible noise; Jacob Grimm compared them to a ghostly army. Here again the moral element is often very pronounced: the shades are those who in some way fell outside the Sacraments of the Church - unbaptised babies, those who died a violent death or committed a major sin and have been banished forever into the sky, the traditional domain of evil spirits. Grimm refers to a twelfth-century German poet who uses 'das wuetende heer' (the raging army) of the Jews who took part in the Crucifixion.

"The connection between the Wandering Jew and the Wild Huntsman is attributed to the mediaeval legend of a Jew who refused Christ permission to drink from a horse trough while carrying the Cross to Calvary, and ordered Him to drink instead the water from a hoof print in the ground. A variant formerly current in Oldenburg said that the Wandering Jew was permitted to rest from mid-May until July, a period of repose also granted to the Wild Huntsman.

"In the Middle Ages the Wild Hunt was also called Cain's Hunt, Cain being another progenitor of the Wandering Jew ...

"[The biblical passage describing God's curse on Cain after the murder of his brother (Genesis IV: 10-15)] sets out certain major mythical concepts which later came to be associated with the Jews as a race: the eternal wandering, the shedding of blood, the curse, and the mark of Cain ..." (p. 103-104).

Although the Germanic deity, Wotan, was the huntsman in the

earliest (extant) accounts of the 'wild hunt', he was often replaced by the Devil in later mediaeval accounts. To treat the legends of Herne the Hunter and the 'wild hunt' as synonymous, therefore, as Rhys Davies does, and to claim that the "legends of the Wild Hunt predate the arrival of the Judaeo-Christian religion in Europe" is somewhat disingenuous. The accounts of the 'wild hunt' that predate Christian sources are vague, and bear little resemblance to the more elaborate versions of the legend that appear in later mediaeval sources.

The character of Herne the Hunter is a more recent historical development, and bears little relation to the Germanic deity of the earlier sources. Similarly, while it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the Herne the Hunter memorialised by Shakespeare bears traces of the antlered Celtic deity, Cernunnos, it is as likely that surviving images of Cernunnos had long been subsumed by mediaeval sources into descriptions of the Christian Devil, so that to the same extent that Jews and the Devil were often seen as being synonymous, so the character of Herne the Hunter came to exhibit similar anti-Semitic traces.

To accuse Roy Bainton of "ignorance of the traditional northern belief systems" ignores the extent to which all knowledge of pagan belief in Europe that predates Christianity is necessarily problematic. Even the Norse and Icelandic saga material is more properly mediaeval (as opposed to Viking Age), so that the philological dimension forms an important and necessary part of any interpretative or textual analysis.

Damian Walter
Frimley, Surrey

Green Park's Druid Grove

This is a response to Tim Webb's letter in FT131:53. At the St. James' Palace end of London's Green Park, beside Queen's Walk, is a perfect circle of 13 trees, all London Planes. Trees don't usually grow in perfect circles, so who planted these and why?

There are 13 sacred trees in the Druid calendar, which relate to the annual lunar cycle; there being 13 full moons in our 12 solar months. Druids also hold their ceremonies at groves of trees, so from that perspective, Green Park's tree circle may have some mystical significance since it would be a perfect sacred Druid grove for full moon ceremonies. Were Green Park's gardeners secret Druids, or were the trees planted by someone else who was?

There are no surviving records about who planted the trees. The only relevant information available from the Royal Parks office was that the trees were planted in the mid-19th century. A bandstand once stood in the centre of the circle, so the trees might have been planted around it, although the Royal Parks spokesperson thought the trees predated the bandstand. In the Sixties and Seventies, the bandstand was a popular nocturnal location for romantic liaisons - which is why the Park's authorities had it removed.

The tree circle lies directly on a major alignment stretching from Hertfordshire, through central London, right down to the south coast. It can be verified on 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey maps as laser-straight from St Nicholas church at The Bury in Stevenage through a spectacular succession of hilltop sites, most of them of considerable antiquity, ending at Rottingdean where the remains of a megalithic monument are still scattered about the town's streets.

In London, the major mark points are St Mary's Church on Oak Hill in East Barnet; St Joseph's church atop Highgate Hill; The Victoria Memorial Fountain; Westminster Cathedral; St Leonard's, Streatham; Pollard's Hill in Norbury (seemingly a suburban hilltop henge); Russell Hill; St John's at Old Coulsden; St Leonard's at Turners Hill; Castle Hill Mound at Bletchingley; St. Peter's Ardingley; St Michael's at Plumpton; and finally, Rottingdean Village Green where there is an old well and, nearby, a standing stone.

Following the alignment through Green Park towards the Victoria Memorial Fountain, I have often felt a strong tingling sensation in my hands and arms, sometimes quite intensely. It's a bit like walking into some kind of electrostatic field. Interestingly, the alignment does not pass directly through the centre of the circle, but runs at a tangent to it, almost as if an energy flow in the line could impart a spin to the circle, or the circle could impart energy to the line, in either or both directions.

The grove is also a junction point for several other alignments, including some complex pentagonal patterns which are part of the Earthstars geometry covering London. Certainly, the atmosphere there is very special. It feels like a sacred place, despite the busy traffic of Piccadilly only a few yards away.

Members of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, for instance, held a couple of grove meetings there last summer and the lunar associations of the tree circle have also been put to good use. The circle has, for the past two years, been the location for monthly Full Moon Meditations dedicated to world peace held, of course, on the evening of each full moon.

My own feeling is that the tree circle was planted as a lunar grove and natural outdoor sacred space. The landed gentry frequently built outdoor temples in their grounds. They are referred to as follies, but they look like temples and can be



SEA CREATURE

I'm sending two of three pictures shot back in 1974 in American Samoa. At the time I saw this dead creature, I had no idea what it was... nor now. I recall it was about a meter long. The slides and nega-

tives [Kodak 5254 process] turned up recently and I had prints made. I emailed this one to a marine biologist, my wife's cousin Johnnie in Portugal. He reckoned it was reminiscent of a Portuguese man-of-war. Another marine biologist, son of a friend here in Melbourne,

SIMULACRA CORNER



These turtles were photographed at an aquarium in Chattanooga, Tennessee, last June by Stacey L. Jones of Gardendale, Alabama. The one at the back appears to have a lugubrious human face.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a fiver or 10 dollars for any we use.

used as such. Like the tree circle, they are frequently found to be built on earth energy nodal points at the junction of dowsable leys. Such buildings have a geomantic purpose and effect.

Whether Green Park's grove was created deliberately or not, it seems to be plugged into the same spiritual energy grid as our oldest churches and other sacred sites and therefore is a fully functional natural sacred space.

If anyone has any further information, I'd be grateful to receive it.

Chris Street
London

Chris Street is the author of *Earthstars* (Hermitage Publishing, 1990), a book on London's sacred alignments. He can be reached at: 74, The Mall, Southgate, London N14 6LP.



looked at all three prints, and took them to the new aquarium in the city, where he works. Several people examined the photos and their best guess was 'some sort of sea bird' maybe...

Joseph L. Elkhorne
Victoria, Australia



Defining 'UFO'

I have a problem with the term UFO. How can something that is observed in the sky be unidentified and yet be identified as (a) flying, and not, for example, floating or levitating; and (b) an object and not a mirage, or a mass of vapour, or something? I would like to suggest as an alternative AAA - Anomalous Aerial Apparition.

Justin Anstey
Longhope, Gloucestershire

Baltic Submarines

The 'wheeled subs' referred to in "Mystery Submarines in the Baltic" [FT138:66] are not quite as absurd a concept as they might seem. Throughout the 1980s, the Soviet Spetsnaz special forces operated miniature submarines fitted with caterpillar tracks, which enabled them to drive over the seabed. These craft were attached to the four standing Spetsnaz Naval Brigades, one of which formed a permanent part of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. The 'mother' subs carrying 'baby' subs also have a basis in fact. The Soviet Navy of the 1980s possessed two India-Class submarines, each capable of carrying, launching and recovering two of the tracked mini-subs from ports built into the boat's upper casing. Although both 'mother' and 'baby' were nominally underwater rescue vessels, it seems unlikely that a force like Spetsnaz (not well known as a humanitarian rescue service) would refrain from using them for other purposes. The mini-subs were ideal delivery and support vehicles for combat frogmen, and it's quite possible they were used during the Cold War for a few clandestine trips to the Swedish seaside.

Colin Goodall
Glasgow

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Book of the Month

Two lives of a religious man

New biographies show that the 'wickedest man' had a fine sense of the ridiculous

A Magick Life

A Biography of Aleister Crowley

MARTIN BOOTH

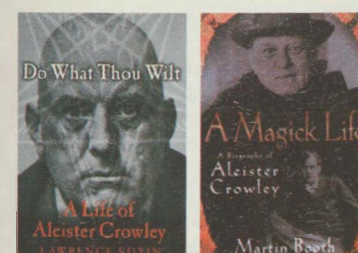
London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000
Hb, £20, pp507, b/w photographs, bibliography, index ISBN: 0-340-71805-6

Do What Thou Wilt

A Life of Aleister Crowley

LAWRENCE SUTIN

St Martin's Press, New York, 2000
Hb, \$27.95, 483pp, b/w photographs, notes, bibliography, index
ISBN: 0-312-25243-9



Aleister Crowley's dictum, "Do what thou wilt", borrowed from Rabelais, was never intended to be an open passport to licentious behaviour. Pagans preface the first four words with "An [if] it hurt none...", while Crowley himself added another sentence, "Love is the Law, Love under Will", which expands the sense considerably.

The only problem is, Crowley's own life exemplifies the popular misconception. His writings and his behaviour were often outrageous; he deliberately set out to shock; he often revelled in the negative publicity he received. His magic was hardly of the "pink fluffy bunny" variety seen at the softer end of New Age practice. He openly advocated drug use. And as for his sex life...

For those who might think that Crowley's reputation must have been exaggerated, these two new biographies will be an eye-opener. Crowley's voracity for sex was such a major part of his life, there's often a different woman (or man) on every page. But Martin Booth is clear that "Crowley may have been oversexed, but he was first and foremost a religious, not

a debauched, character". And this, really, is the main emphasis of both books.

Crowley, whatever his many faults, was deeply religious. He never really shook off his childhood in the Exclusive Brethren; Lawrence Sutin mentions that "Crowley felt himself deeply flawed by his lingering puritanism and sense of sin". (Considering his chosen way of life, that must have been something of a problem.) He also had doubts about his calling; after he left the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, he turned his back on magic for several years, immersing himself in Buddhism (one of the few friends who stuck with him over the years was the Buddhist Alan Bennett). When he received perhaps his most famous work, the *Book of the Law*, by some form of spiritual dictation in 1904, he "resented the book... Putting him in charge of making public [the Secret Chiefs'] innermost secrets rendered him both frightened and reluctant", writes Booth. He actually mislaid its manuscript for several years.

Once he did go down the magickal path in earnest, however, he quickly earned the vilification of the press. *John Bull* magazine and the *Sunday Express*, in particular, set out to destroy him with a skilful mixture of fact, distortion and outright lies; knowing he didn't have the money to sue them for libel, "emboldened by this knowledge, the press rightly considered itself all but immune from prosecution".

Both these biographies are excellent, thorough studies of Crowley's life and work, sympathetic but brutally honest about Crowley's failings. Sutin's *Do What Thou Wilt* is the more detailed, with perhaps a little more on the magic than Booth's *A Magick Life*, and would be of great value to anyone pursuing a Crowleyite esoteric path. Booth's is the more readable, and probably more suited to the averagely-interested reader; it also has 38 photographs, against Sutin's eight. Both books are inestimably better than Roger Hutchinson's dreadful *Aleister Crowley: The Beast Demystified* (reviewed in FT126).

In addition to his rampant sexuality, his drug abuse and his supreme arrogance, one of Crowley's greatest flaws was his utter incapability with money.

FLAWED BY HIS LINGERING PURITANISM

He inherited a small fortune at 21, and spent it all within a few years. He produced expensive limited editions of his many books, often pricing them at less than they cost him. He travelled the world, stayed in expensive hotels and entertained lavishly. When he ran out of money, he scrounged from friends and wrote begging letters to slight acquaintances (including the father of *FT* editor Paul Sieveking). He lived from hand to mouth for years. He finally hit rock bottom in 1935, and was still an undischarged bankrupt (and heroin addict) at his death in a Hastings boarding house 12 years later. This was a miserable end to an extremely full, tempestuous, controversial and often brilliant life.

In his younger days, Crowley was an excellent mountaineer; he established remarkable records on both K2 and Kanchenjunga. But his arrogance hardly endeared him to the Alpine Club, and he often showed an almost criminal lack of judgement in both the selection of his climbing teams and his relations with them. In later life he became a highly original and quite accomplished artist; his signature was the letter "A" as a stylised penis. Both books also show Crowley to have been, at times, an excellent poet—and at times not; what he really needed was a good editor to sort out the sublime from the ridiculous.

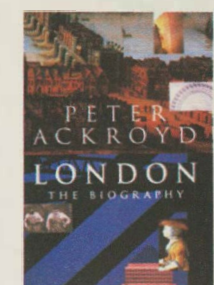
Crowley's humour, his sense of the ridiculous, comes out in both these biographies. Perhaps above all else, this is what those who still view him as "the wickedest man in the world" have missed—and perhaps it also explains his astonishing sexual success.

DAVID V BARRETT

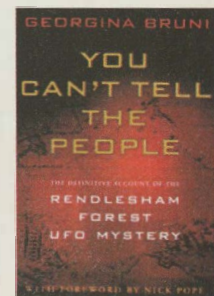
FORTEAN VERDICT

**Neophytes summon Booth;
Ipsissimi should invoke
Sutin**

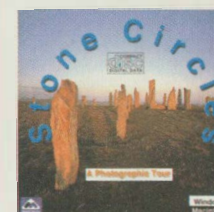
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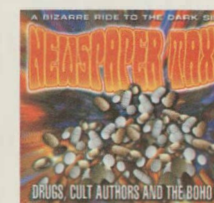
**London: The
Biography**
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**You Can't Tell
the People**
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**Win a Stone
Circles CD-Rom**
page 59



**Newspaper
Taxis**
page 59



YOU REVIEW



OPUS: VOLUME ONE

Barry Windsor-Smith
Fantagraphics Books
(www.fantagraphics.com),
Seattle, USA, 1999
Hb, \$39, pp176, full-colour &
B&W illus
ISBN: 1-5609-7367-6

Back in the Mists of Time, Barry Windsor-Smith was one of a small bunch of London comic illustrators and forteans who encouraged me to start *Fortean Times*. Then Barry went off to work for Marvel Comics in the USA – where he drew Nick Fury, Daredevil, X-Men and, innovatively, Conan – before founding his own studio in New York with other famous illustrators like Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta and Berni Wrightson. You can look him up on

www.barrywindsor-smith.com. Now, nearly three decades later, here is the first of an autobiographical series about his odyssey. It is sumptuously illustrated with his distinctive comic-book pages, luminous paintings, classical posters, and starkly beautiful drawings and designs. That, alone, would make it a collectors' item, but Barry felt compelled to tell a different kind of story – about the imagination and philosophy of a modern artist – with as much care as pours into his amazing art. Here, "a lifetime of anomalous experiences... of precognition and visions of primordial creation... unknown realms of extra-dimensional consciousness and separate realities..." is presented in a haunting and literate memoir of genuine merit.

BOB RICKARD

London: The Biography

PETER ACKROYD

Chatto & Windus, London, 2000
Hb, £25, 820pp, plates, photos, illus, index
ISBN 1-8561-9716-6

Few writers can claim to know London – or rather, the various cities of that name which have existed at various periods in history – like Peter Ackroyd, and this masterful work ably demonstrates this knowledge. The 'biography' tag might be seen as an affectation, but allows him certain freedoms perhaps not readily available to the more formal historian. Rather than present a straightforward chronology, Ackroyd rambles from topic to topic, drawing links between notions, locations and people which might not obviously appear connected and showing up some of the curiosities of this most intriguing of cities.

Of course, what concerns us is the stranger aspect of London, its hauntings and visionaries; perhaps inevitably for Ackroyd, the various phenomena are well represented here. Old favourites like William Blake (subject of a previous and equally impressive Ack-

royd biography) and Scratching Fanny, the ghost of Cock Lane, rub shoulders with more recent prodigies like the late Mr Stanley Green, the 'Protein Man' who wandered Oxford Street selling his gnomonic dietary chapbooks. Your reviewer's personal favourite London ghost, a cylinder full of milky blue fluid which appeared in the Tower of London during the 1930s, gets a brief mention, while one of Fort's favourite coincidences – the execution of Messrs Green, Berry and Hill on Greenberry (now Primrose) Hill – forms the basis of one of many brief meditations on the psychogeographical aspects of the city. Ackroyd's broader vision, too, is one with which forteans might find some sympathy. There is a strong emphasis on the interconnectedness of the various apparently disparate aspects of the city. Throughout, he alludes to an inherent paganism, a worldliness blended with otherworldliness, which he seems to regard as one of the city's

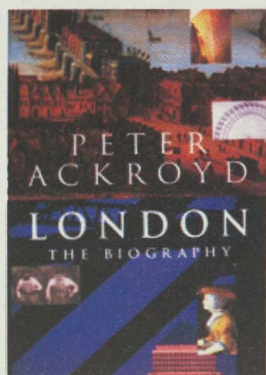
main defining characteristics. The sections which deal with the Great Fire of 1666 – and other, earlier and now largely forgotten 'Great Fires' – in particular seem to be saying that some supernatural or preternatural affinity with fire is inherent in the fabric of the city itself. Even the 'biography' of the title implies a portrait of the city as a living entity. Quite apart from this, *London* is a real treat for anyone intrigued by the city's long and sanguinary history. It is as vital and readable as it is visionary and monumental; it gives life to

history in a way that few books have or can.

JOE MCNALLY

FORTEAN VERDICT

An extraordinary and frankly unmissable portrait of a city brimming with strangeness



The Perfect Heresy

STEPHEN O'SHEA

Profile Books (www.profile-books.co.uk), London, 2000
Hb, £15, pp333, index, bib, illus
ISBN 1-8619-7270-9

The Cathars – aka the Albigensians – earned a pivotal position in the development of the Western mystical tradition and its modern offshoots, the fields of conspiracy and mystery. They were a group of heretical Christian communities spread across the Languedoc region of southern France in the early 1200s. They held property in common, gave women equal status, and rejected marriage and other sacraments; they also believed in reincarnation and regarded this world as the true Hell (ruled by Satan). While some of these ideas may seem innocuous enough to us, the Catholic Church in that time saw them as the greatest threat to their rights and institutions.

Popes convinced successive French kings and nobles to send whole armies to crush these revolutionaries; the crusade generals were brutal in the extreme, yet some, like Simon de Montfort, are now revered as Catholic heroes. The tone was set in 1209, when an army led by the monk Arnold Amaury

besieged 20,000 people in the town of Béziers. Asking for advice on how to tell Cathars from Catholics, Amaury is said to have told his troops: "Kill them all. God will know his own." And so they did. Many other terrible massacres followed, of which the destruction of the last Cathar stronghold at Montségur in 1244 is the best known. Hundreds of thousands of these essentially peaceful and celibate sectarians perished; nevertheless the sect survived, if feebly and secretly, until 1309, when mass arrests in the village of Montailou dealt a final blow.

A painful death was not the only indignity facing the Cathars; the disinformation put out by the Church and State combined, accused the Cathars of every conceivable abominable act of immorality topped with treason and witchcraft. The Albigensian Crusade and the persecution of the Cathars provides a prime example of official counter-conspiracy – how government can act with extreme prejudice against any perceived threat to its power base. However, this terrible tragedy has been upstaged by modern authors who see more occult conspiracies underlying the pogroms. They seek the literal (not the spiritual) treasure the Cathars are supposed to have inherited from the Templars, or suggest that the treasure may even

have been the bloodline of Christ, of which the persecuted were the true guardians.

O'Shea's hugely enjoyable text is founded on impressive scholarship; full of detail and passion, it is a delight to read. It is the perfect balance for (or antidote to) the flights of fancy of the 'secret treasure' and 'bloodline of Christ' schools. O'Shea does not dismiss them completely but acknowledges them and provides the context for them as, themselves, dissident children of the Cathar heresy – and likewise for the mass suicides of the Order of the Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate (of recent memory) who cited the Cathars as their spiritual ancestors.

BOB RICKARD

FORTEAN VERDICT

A brilliant, relevant and readable overview of one of Catholicism's most shameful persecutions.

The Magic Of Shapeshifting

ROSALYN GREENE

Samuel Weiser Inc (www.weiser-books.com), York Beach, Maine, 2000 Pb, \$16.95, pp258, index, bib, glossary ISBN 1-5786-3171-8

Yes, a book about people turning into animals – not just wolves, but also seals, cats, dogs (known as werewolves), foxes... just about

anything. While physical shifting is presented as a reality – Greene was herself a physical shifter, albeit in a previous life – it is regarded as rare, one to every 30 or so 'mental' shifters. The author claims to have met several physical shifters, but readers can rest easy: "Unless werewolves are very evil people to begin with, or have harboured intense hate against someone for a long time, they will not be dangerous." Most shifting occurs mentally, in dreams or on the astral. This book tells you how to bring on the shift and how to look out for it in others – increased appetite during full moon, changes in skin or eye colour, growing fur etc – nothing you wouldn't notice yourself, in fact. The cynical reader, however, might suspect that the reality of shifting lies more in lines like "Modern skinwalkers wear acrylic fake fur and get spectacular results."

Although intriguing in places, the book probably spends too much time in the fluffy (furry?), spiritual rather than the folkloric realms for most forteans, but should certainly be of interest to cultural anthropologists in search of fresh sub-cultures to study.

MARK PILKINGTON

FORTEAN VERDICT

Curious, frightening and howlingly funny in places

ALSO RECEIVED

Reviews by Mark Pilkington

The Girl Who Gave Birth To Rabbits

A True Medical Mystery
CLIFFORD A. PICKOVER, PHD
Prometheus Books, 2000, pb,
\$19.00 ISBN 1-57392-794-5

The story of Mary Toft, the eighteenth century Godalming woman who 'gave birth' to rabbits and to a particularly grisly cat-eel thing – has been told many times, in these pages [FT108:28] and elsewhere. Pickover considers how it was that Toft was able to fool, at least for a while, some of history's most esteemed physicians and surgical pioneers. He provides a good deal of background on contemporary folkloric and medical beliefs, showing how they were often interchangeable, while (this being a Prometheus book) reminding us of the potential for gullibility amongst today's 'experts'. Well illustrated with prints, cartoons and etchings, Pickover delivers a dense and extremely thoughtful treatment of this macabre tale, though it's perhaps a trifle slim at the price.

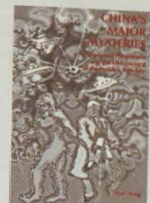


China's Major Mysteries

PAUL DONG
China Books & Periodicals Inc, 2000 \$16.95
ISBN 0-8351-2676-5

A welcome revised and slightly expanded edition of 1984's *The Four Major Mysteries of Mainland China*. For over 20 years, Dong has been writing on paranormal phenomena for major Chinese newspapers and magazines, including *The People's Daily* and *Science and Life*, as well as editing the first UFO journal to appear in a Socialist country, *The Journal of UFO Research*.

Dong looks at four main areas: UFOs, Exceptional Human Function (psychic abilities), Qi Gong, and the Chinese Wild Man, summarising both the research itself, and the reactions of the authorities to the research. There are a number of startling cases and ideas presented here: the potential for Qi Gong as a cancer treatment; the successful training of school children in ESP and telekinesis; the continuing study of people with 'X-ray' vision and the ability to diagnose illnesses at a glance; and, despite recent official protestations, continued signs of

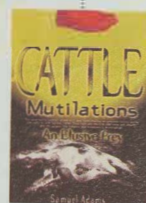


wildman activity. This is a fascinating survey, and we can only hope that more such findings will continue to make their way West in the future.

Cattle Mutilations

An Elusive Prey
SAMUEL ADAMS
Pentland Press, 2000, \$11.95
ISBN 1-57197-217-X

Adams spent 30 years as a cattle farmer in Mississippi. In May 1996, he discovered one of his prize cows dead, far from the rest of the herd, exuding a sulphurous odour and displaying all the hallmarks of a classic mutilation. Following hunches born of some very strange internal logic, Adams finds himself caught between rival groups of giant extraterrestrial humanoids. One unscrupulous bunch wants to use bovine matter to create genetic mutants for gladiator-style arena battles on another world, the other – a kind of intergalactic World Wildlife Fund – wants them to leave us and our cows alone. Incredibly strange, and certainly one for collectors of



which, for the most part, should be of interest to investigators of altered states, whether experienced or not. A lengthy interview with the late tryptamine ambassador Terrence McKenna rounds off the volume nicely.

JENNY RANGLES

FORTEAN VERDICT

An ink blot test for UFO enthusiasts

You Can't Tell The People:

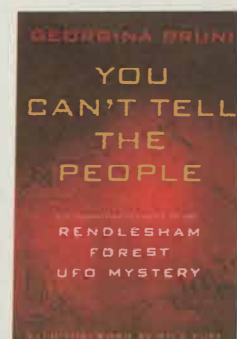
The definitive account of the Rendlesham Forest Mystery

GEORGINA BRUNI

Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 2000
Hb £17.99, pp449, illus, index, bib
ISBN 0-283-06358-0

This infamous case is shrouded in confusion, but Bruni's book makes a decent stab at covering the 1980 UFO sightings which puzzled USAF personnel in England. There is an almighty battle raging between those convinced that this is a well-documented encounter with an alien craft and those who say the whole thing is a huge misperception. Some ufologists now fear that this case has crumbled into a sea of lighthouses, meteors, stars, rabbit holes and dubious radiation readings.

Unfortunately, to appreciate the impact of such issues requires deeper insight than offered by this book.



The once seemingly-absurd suggestion that the Orford Ness lighthouse was a primary cause has strengthened, not weakened, as new facts have come to light. Bruni strongly disagrees with this suggestion – which is fair enough – and the sceptics' conclusions are mentioned, but Scottish ufologist James Easton does not even feature though he has argued the misperception theory through several major reports and brought to light crucial signed witness statements which transform one's understanding of this case. Whether you agree with his opinion or loathe it, a 'definitive' account must not ignore him. Which is a pity, because Georgina Bruni clearly has the ability to tell a story.

The reason for the book's curious title is also instructive. It emerges from a conversation the author had at a charity dinner in May 1997. As the party was breaking up, she collared former prime minister Margaret Thatcher and sprung on her the

subject of UFOs. Maggie spoke just two short sentences in reply. One was "You can't tell the people" (hence the book's title) and the other "You must get your facts right". Did she thus let slip a hint about UFO secrecy? Or perhaps Maggie simply meant that any writer should get their facts on UFOs right rather than proffer the usual tabloid twaddle about government conspiracies.

How one interprets this snatch of conversation will dictate how you take to this entire book. Do you drool over the prospect that you are getting an insight into a dark cover-up? Or do you start asking questions as to what more reasonably might be going on?

This is certainly a promising first book. While by no means the definitive story of the case or the final word on it, it is worth treating as a starting point for a longer exploration of strange events that may prove a turning point in British UFO history.



EACH MONTH FT
REVISITS AN OUT-OF-
PRINT BUT STILL
IMPORTANT CLASSIC

FORTEAN BOOKSHELF

SHAKESPEARE'S
"EDMUND
IRONSIDE"

ERIC SAMS

Wildwood House,
Aldershot, 1986
Pb, pp383, index, refs,
bib
ISBN 0-7045-0547-9

"[T]he literary establishment's tendency to select or invent historical facts that conform with its own opinions, and ignore or distort the rest [...] is a scandal, a Piltown skull." Fort's philosophy applies everywhere, and Sams' fortified defence of what he is adamant is a lost Shakespeare play shows that dogma and prejudice are not the exclusive reserve of the natural sciences. As Sams has recently succeeded in having *Edward III* admitted to the canon, this volume is not easily dismissed. His (very accessible) edition of *Ironside* is jaw-dropping in its exposure of generations of gerrymandering. Not only is the text of *Ironside* reproduced, with commentary, but three-quarters of the book consists of invaluable and fascinating analyses of the manuscript's history. Amid Shakespeare's literary hallmarks, such as his distinctive wordplay and imagery, word-coinages, ransacking of particular sources, are some startling psychological fingerprints (ever heard of the 'dogs/sugar/melting cluster'? You have now...). If you came to this book knowing nothing about Shakespeare, you would still walk away able to silence hordes of loopy "the-bard-was-someone-else" theorists, and with working knowledge of Elizabethan literary practices and manuscript dating. In other words; strongly recommended "Exit, pursued by a [bug]bear".

GARRICK ALDER



AUDIO CDS

**The Black Flower-Bus
Leaves at Dawn
A Saucer Full of Secrets
Newspaper Taxis**

Chrome Dreams 2000
Written by Keith Rodway
All £5.99, from
www.chromedreams.co.uk

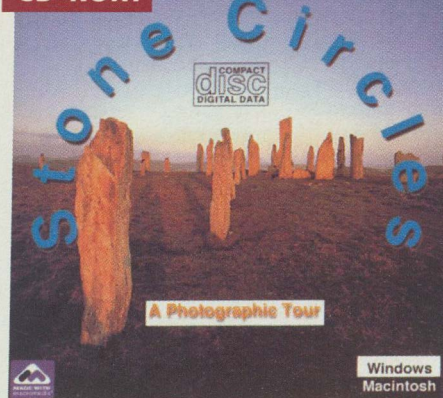
A neat idea: three audio documentaries featuring clips culled from archive material and fresh interviews. *Black Flower-Bus...* covers cults and new religious movement, and their leaders: David Koresh, Jim Jones, Charles Manson, L. Ron Hubbard, Aleister Crowley and frineds. *Saucer* looks at UFOs and their occupants, with sound bites from Stanton Friedman, Bob Lazar, Tony Dodd, J Allen Hynek, Stephen Schiff and Rupert Sheldrake, amongst others. *Newspaper Taxis* deals with psychedelic literature, drugs and the people who came under their influence, with Timothy Leary, Philip K Dick, Aldous Huxley, Ken Kesey, William Burroughs, Bruce Sterling and William Gibson providing the colour.

All three CDs serve as useful introductions to their subjects, especially as their accompanying booklets provide further reading and resources. It's always interesting to hear your favourite authors and/or cult leaders speak for themselves, though the effect is somewhat spoilt by the often disparaging tone of the narrators. Still these are undeniably good value and are certainly worth a listen.

COMPETITION

Thanks to Chrome Dreams, we've got three pairs of CDs to give away. To win, tell us in which country Jim Jones and his followers died *en masse* in 1978. Email your answers to mark.pilkington@johnbrown.co.uk, subject 'Chrome Comp', or on postcard to CHROME COMP, Fortean Times, PO BOX 20139, London W10 6GU. Competition closes 28 February 2001.

CD-ROM



**Stone Circles
A Photographic Tour**
TOM BULLOCK

PC/Mac CD-Rom, £20.00 + £2.20p+p
Available from www.megalithic.co.uk
Further details from 46 Crosslands Road,
Epsom, Surrey, KT19 9SS

What is it about stone circles that inspires fanatical devotion? Certainly there's no shortage of books about these enigmatic sites, and someone is really going to have to pull something out of the bag to even come close to rivaling Aubrey Burl's *The Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany*

(see review next issue). However, Tom Bullock's *Stone Circles: A Photographic Tour* is a welcome addition to the genre, and is, as far as I'm aware, the first CD-Rom to look at these ancient places.

So what do you get for your money? In essence, the CD is a complete listing (or as complete as can be, because new information is turning up all the time) of all the stone circles and stone rows known to exist (or to have existed) in the British Isles. More than 500 of the entries include original photographs taken by the author during a 10-year marathon site crawl. Most of the photographs are excellent and many are quite superb. The CD is fully searchable, and the user interface and navigation tools are simple to use, allowing you to point-and-click on maps to find your way around the megalithic landscape.

One minor grumble is that there is very little background information on the archaeology, theories and folklore surrounding the sites; perhaps an introductory essay would have been useful. However, the CD is primarily aimed at hardcore stoneheads (or megaraks, as they're called by people in the know) most of whom probably already have bookshelves full of megalithic literature.

That small omission aside, *Stone Circles* gets my vote and is highly recommended to readers with an interest in these old stones.

NEIL MORTIMER

UK readers who would like a copy in a hurry can also order it for £18, that's 10% off the list price with free postage. Just quote FT when ordering.

FORTEAN VERDICT

Recommended, especially for megaraks bearing laptops.

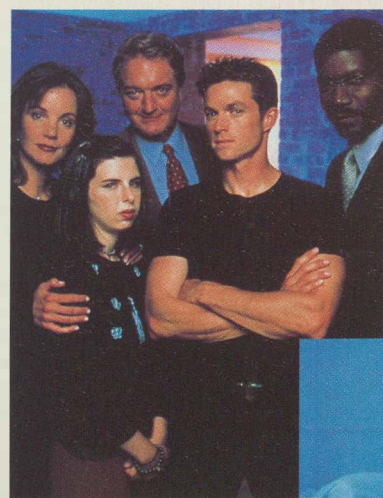
COMPETITION

We have FIVE copies of the Stone Circles CD Rom to give away.

To win, just tell us which 18th century historian first posited the idea of Avebury's Beckhampton Avenue. Send answers to mark.pilkington@johnbrown.co.uk, subject 'Avebury comp', or by post to Avebury Competition, Fortean Times, PO BOX 20139, London W10 6GU. Competition closes 28 February 2001. There are also FIVE copies to be won at www.forteanimes.com.

SPECIAL

**NOW AND AGAIN
UK TV PREMIERE**



From Glenn Gordon Caron, creator of the classic *Moonlighting*, comes this acclaimed new series which defies simple classification. Is it science fiction, comedy, action, drama or all of the above? Opening with a gripping three part storyline that will draw you in from the outset, the excellent production values, superb acting and intriguing plot lines

will make sure you come back for more.

In the pilot episode, John Goodman (a cameo role only) plays Michael Wiseman, a regular family man killed in a subway accident. The US government retrieve his battered body and remove his brain, keeping it alive until it can be transplanted into a new, genetically bio-engineered 'perfect' body (played by *Dark Skies*' Eric Close). Michael agrees to the transplant and a second chance at life, but while he is thrilled by his new physical attributes and happy to become a secret government operative he is horrified by the catch: for security reasons he can never see his wife or daughter again ...

Now and Again is a genetically modified *Six Million Dollar Man*, but thankfully this time they remembered to include brains and a heart. There's no slow motion running, but plenty of fast-paced action.

Premieres: Tuesday 16th January
at 9pm (repeated Thursdays
at 12 midnight)

ADVERTISEMENT BY



**JANUARY
HIGHLIGHTS
INCLUDE**

**MONDAY 1ST JAN
FROM 8AM**

Planet of the Apes
(TV series)

*Behind the Planet of
the Apes* hosted by
Roddy mc Dowell
(5.30pm)

**MONDAY 1ST JAN
@ 8PM**

Top 11 Sci-Fi Movies
hosted by Alex Cox

**SUNDAY 7TH JAN
@ 12 NOON**

Nosferatu (1922)

**MONDAY 15TH
JAN @ 10PM**

Last Lives (1997)

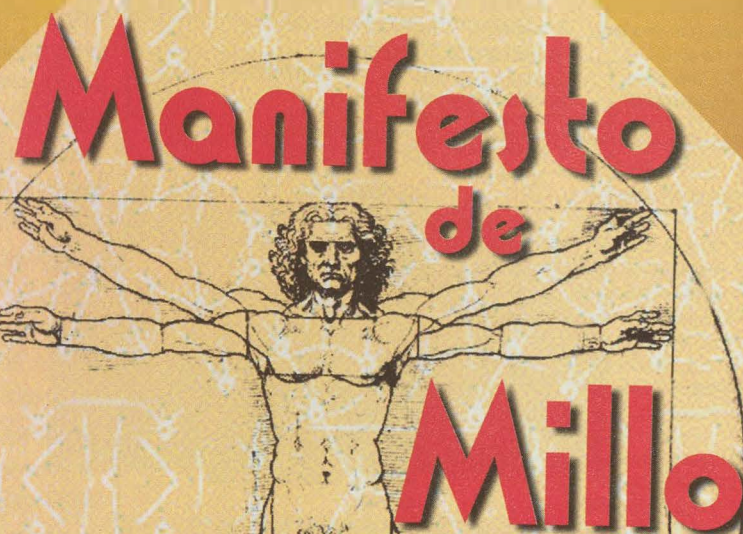
**THURSDAY 15TH
JAN @ 10PM**

Child's Play (1988)

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WHY NOT BECOME AN FT CLIPPER?

Regular clippers have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Ideally, send them flat in an A4 stiff envelope. Mark each clip (on the front, where

possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 11 Aug 1999. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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www.forteanimes.com, where there is a contributor's guide.



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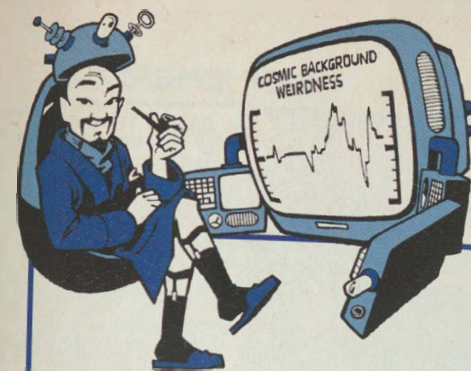
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Hierophant

In his fortress of arrogance, deep below the Himalayas, the immortal Ascended Master known as the Hierophant travels the more disreputable paths of fortanea...

Like any great teacher, few things give the Hierophant a nicer feeling inside than to see one of his protégés go on to much greater things. You can probably imagine the glee I felt when the news recently broke that our old chum Matthew Williams had achieved national – if not international – celebrity as the first person in Britain to be punished for creating crop circles. Williams was first mentioned here around a year ago in connection with an entirely opaque feud with Andy Roberts. Williams was fined £100 at Devizes Magistrate's Court in November, although we note that the mysterious 'American friend' with whom he made his formation seems to have dropped out of the story altogether. Curiouser and curiuser. Best quote to come out of the whole business came from one Andrew Naughton, who farms near Williams' home town of Devizes: "Imagine you had a green car and someone came along and sprayed pretty patterns on the roof with white paint. That's the only way I can describe it."

There are hoaxes, and there's just plain confusion. Reports appeared in several newspapers recently regarding a firm purportedly trading under the name Alien Abductions Inc. AAI's particular line of business, it was claimed, was the implantation by hypnotic suggestion of false memories of alien abduction. According to the stories, though, they had taken the process even further, and had begun implanting advertisements along with the abduction memories – shades of 'Futurama'. The Hierophant simply can't shake the feeling that this is probably an attempt at that fancy 'viral marketing' we hear about these days – can any readers shed any further light?

The good citizens of Portsmouth haven't exactly had a brilliant press lately, what with witchhunt-style riots on some of the

town's housing estates and suchlike. Sadly, I'm not about to do anything to change that here. A resident of the town – he had probably best remain nameless for his own safety – passes on a clipping from the *Portsmouth News* (8 Nov). In a letter to the paper, one Alice Theobald (Mrs) of Droxford puts forward her theories about the weird weather that was sweeping Britain back then. "Do you notice," writes Mrs Theobald, "that a few days after another rocket has been sent through the



atmosphere the weather goes haywire?" No, but please continue. "Ordinary folk are really not in the least interested if there is water or life on the Moon. We have the Stone Age, the Ice Age, the Bronze Age. This will be known as the Global Warming Age if any of us survives." Before going on to suggest that her readers check out *Genesis* 6 and 7 (presumably a pair of Star Trek spin-offs or some such), Mrs Theobald lays it on the line: "My husband and I put the blame on the scientists." As should we all, Mrs Theobald, as should we all.

Things have come to a merry pass when people actually request sarcasm. "Greetings!" writes Bill Turner of 'Near London

Heathrow'. "We are a free & friendly E-Group (mail-list) devoted to discovering more about the mysterious Triangular UFO's & Secret Military 'Black' programs... We're non-profit (loss-making actually!), but are trying to expand our 220+ membership, so a plug from you, even with rude/sarkey comments, would be much appreciated!" Perish the thought. More details at <http://members.aol.com/Secretjet/index.html>

Ever since such things have existed, the Yorkshire town of Whitby has been something of a beacon to goths. The Hierophant seems to remember that various clergymen in the area have seen fit to complain about the massive numbers of eerily pallid, black lace and PVC-clad youths to be seen around the town. Things will not be getting much easier, since the town now looks set to acquire its very own resident Dracula. Vlad Dracula Prince Kretzulesco, the last surviving member of the Dracula lineage, is reportedly toying with the idea of moving there from Castle Dracula in eastern Germany. Prince – or should it be Graf? – Dracula was in the news a year or so back when he appealed to Germans to give blood; sadly, he now appears to have fallen under the all-too-real curse of unwelcome attention from local neo-Nazi thugs, which is why he is pondering the move to England. "The British are good to foreigners, and have liberal attitudes," he apparently says, which suggests that he may be in for a rude awakening should he actually take up residence. It's just a pity that he didn't make the move while Michael Howard was still Home Secretary; the two would probably have found a great deal in common.

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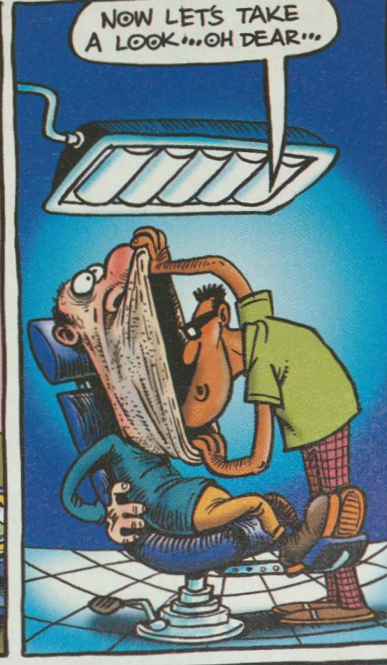
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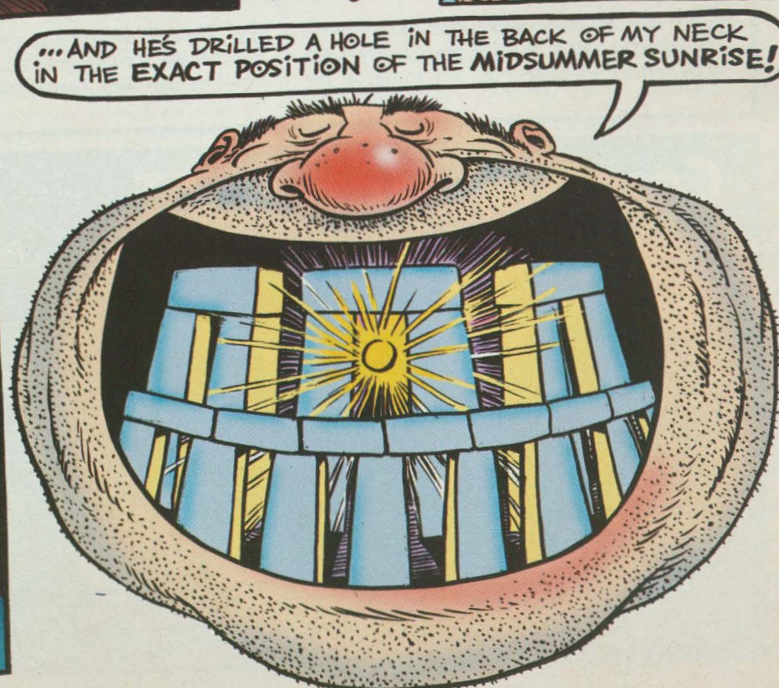
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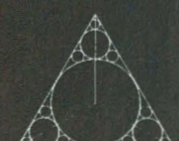
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Whatever happened to...

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19. Ball Lightning



Ball lightning is a rare example of a fortein phenomenon that has been, reluctantly, accepted by the scientific community. After decades of disbelief, speculation and failed theories, it at last looks as though there is a credible and tested theory which can explain the mystery of ball lightning.

For centuries, reports of glowing balls of fire during thunderstorms were regarded as little more than a peasant superstition. Occultists considered them "entirely inexplicable", and to folklorists they were proof of the old tales about 'spook lights' or 'Will-o'-the-Wisps'. Because of the initial scientific indifference to sound observations, even Charles Fort was moved to call the phenomenon "a thing of the ultra-damned".

They were not taken seriously by meteorologists until the 1850s; but even as late as 1951, the American Meteorological Society's *Compendium of Meteorology* still regarded ball lightning as "an optical illusion caused by vision of a lightning discharge being retained in the retina," an explanation which hardly fits the facts. From the start, there was disagreement between scientists as to whether this was a real or imagined phenomenon; yet accredited accounts of ball lightning poured into the popular and scientific press.

Unlike sheet or fork lightning, ball lightning is relatively long-lived – typically lasting 20–30 seconds – and appears as a small red, orange or yellow ball that gently floats through the air. Usually, the ball dissolves, but occasionally it will violently explode, damaging anyone or anything nearby. Awe-inspiring, unpredictable and dangerous, it's easy to see why uneducated people attributed to these fiery spheres supernatural properties.

A sighting in Tewkesbury during a thunderstorm on 7 June 1996 is typical. Workers observed a bright blue-white ball bounce along the factory roof and then pass into the building itself via wire netting. The ball bounced around the inside of the factory for several seconds before hitting a window and exploding "like a gunshot". In other cases, the balls have been observed to travel through an observer's clothing, 'bore' through glass or set metal objects in motion.

The longest-standing and, until now, most favoured theory is that ball lightning is a spherical plasma of superheated gas created by the massive electrical discharge of a lightning strike. Such glowing plasma balls have also been associated with geological fault zones and have been mooted as possible explanations for

UFO sightings and crop circles. However, ball lightning observations do not fit the predicted behaviour of gas plasmas very well, being too rapid, erratic and paradoxical. Another theory suggests that turbulence created by thunderstorms could force together small particles of anti-matter, forming a fiery ball.

More excitement was generated in the early 1980s, when small glowing balls of light were found to emanate from exploding submarine batteries. Although these small, burning spheres looked and behaved like ball lightning, the physical processes involved were quite different. At the dawn of the 21st century, the best guess was that ball lightning was an unknown mixture of ionised gas and electromagnetic field energy. However, on 3 February 2000, a new hypothesis emerged from the laboratory experiments of John Abrahamson and James Dimmish of the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

Abrahamson and Dimmish's initial study looked at the way in which the electronics industry extracts pure silicon from impure mixtures of silica and carbon, using high temperatures to vaporise the silica away from the carbon. They realised that if lightning struck an organic-rich soil, the chemistry and temperatures could cause the same reaction to occur in nature. Using laboratory experiments, they recreated the scenario, striking a soil rich in silica and carbon with artificial lightning. The high temperatures vaporised the silica in the soil, forming a cloud of pure silicon gas particles. This hovering cloud of gas was highly reactive and could spontaneously burn, forming a fiery ball which would wander randomly and quickly across the landscape.

It was calculated that such a ball of burning could be as large as 30cm in diameter and burn brightly for up to 30 seconds before either exploding or fading away, depending on its instability. It was also calculated that the appearance of the incandescent ball could be delayed for some time after the lightning strike. This satisfies all the observed aspects of ball lightning.

While Abrahamson and Dimmish successfully produced the necessary silicon gas, they did not manage to induce a spontaneous example of ball lightning. Nonetheless, their theory has been greeted with interest by a scientific community in dire need of an explanation for a phenomenon that it had initially refused to believe existed.

PAUL CHAMBERS

SOURCES:

Nature, 3 Feb; *New Scientist*, 5 Feb; *Daily Telegraph*; 21 Aug 2000; *Daily Mail*, 25 July 96, 20 Sept 99; *The Unexplained*, vi, pp218–220.

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING

KEY BOOKS ON THIS SUBJECT

The Nature of Ball Lightning (Plenum Press, 1971)
Singer, S.

Lightning, Auroras... etc. (Sourcebook Project, 1982).
William Corliss.

RECOMMENDED SURFING

KEY WEBSITES ON THIS SUBJECT

Scientific American's BL page
www.sciam.com/askexpert/physics/physics30.html

William Corliss' Science Frontiers Online; type 'ball lightning' in the searchbox for accredited cases:
<http://www.science-frontiers.com/sfonline.htm>

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

In which we return to some of the stories reported in the pages of *Fortean Times*...

NO MORE MONKEY BUSINESS [FT138:4]

Voters in Kansas have repudiated the removal of human evolution from the state science standards by state school board's six-to-four vote in August 1999, making it all but certain that the decision will be overturned. Three of the four conservative state board candidates who supported the decision were defeated in a Republican primary last August. The incumbent chairwoman, Linda Holloway, lost by a margin of some 60% to 40%. In the November general election, three moderate Republicans faced three Democrats, and all six candidates have pledged to overturn the ban. There is now a pro-evolution majority on the school board.

While the board vote in 1999 did not prevent schools from teaching evolution, leaving the decision to schools, it effectively removed evolution as the sole explanation for the origin of species, as well as the Big Bang theory for the origin of the Universe, from state student assessment tests. The move was meant to discourage teachers from spending time on those subjects.

Creationists still have quite a grip on American education. Only 31 states require high schools to teach students about evolution. Lawrence Lerner, of California State University at Long Beach, reports in *Nature* (vol 407, p287) that in 19 states, school standards for biology, geology and cosmology either ignore evolution, or refer to it in Creationist terms. *Int. Herald Tribune*, 4 Aug; *New Scientist*, 23 Sept; *Scientific American* Sept/Oct 2000.

If you have any suggestions for topics you would like to see covered in this section, or if you have any information, send them to the editorial address on page 60 or email them to us at ft@johnbrown.co.uk with "Whatever happened" in the subject line.

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